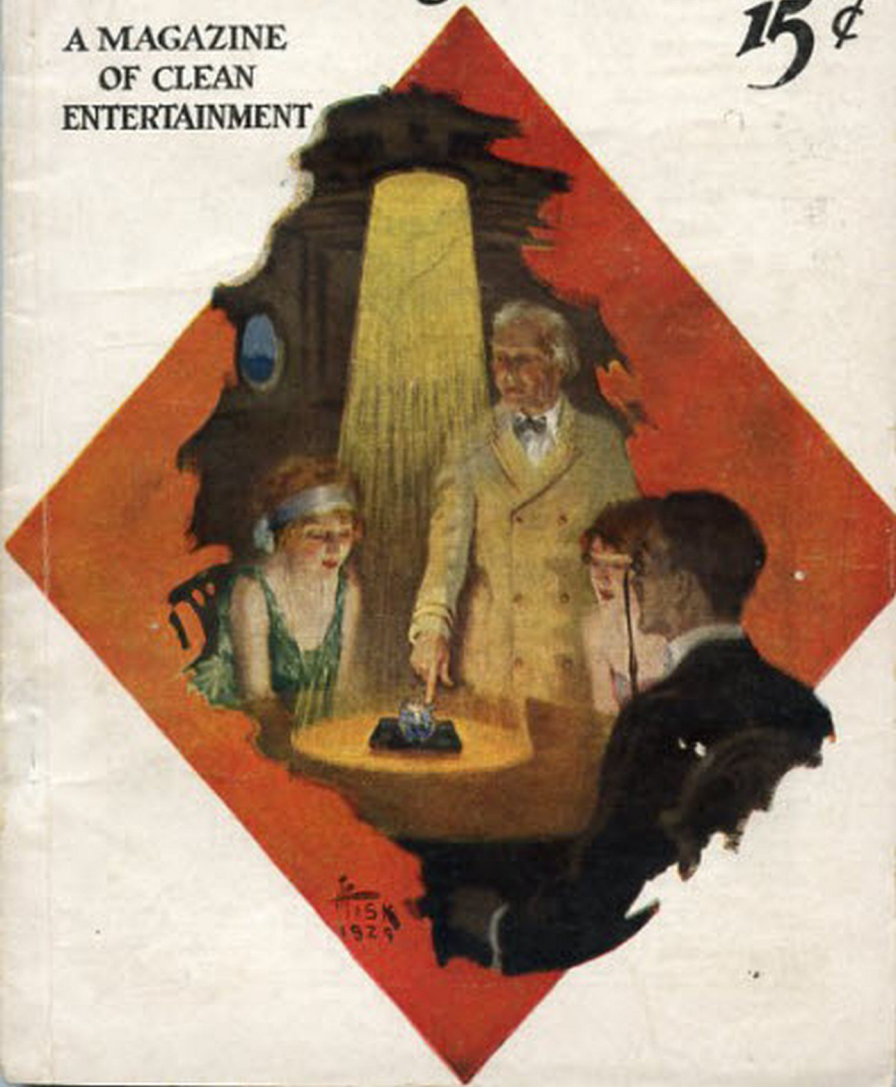
Oct. 10, 1924

Complete Story Magazine

15¢

A MAGAZINE OF CLEAN ENTERTAINMENT



TWICE-A-MONTH

Complete Story Magazine

With which is combined PEOPLE'S MAGAZINE

Vol. I **Contents for October 10, 1924** **No. 4**

Publication issued semimonthly by Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York City. ORMOND G. SMITH, President; GEORGE C. SMITH, Vice President and Treasurer; GEORGE C. SMITH, JR., Vice President; ORMOND V. GOULD, Secretary. Entered as Second-class Matter, June 27th, 1924, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under Act of Congress of March 3, 1879. Canadian Subscription, $3.70. Foreign, $4.25.

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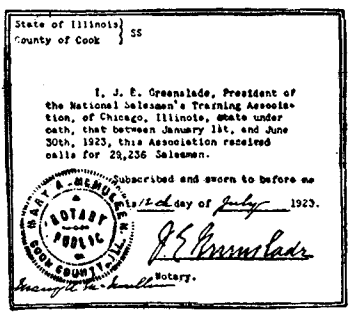

State of Illinois } SS
County of Cook }

I, J. E. Greenslade, President of the National Salesmen's Training Association, of Chicago, Illinois, state under oath, that between January 1st, and June 30th, 1923, this Association received calls for 28,256 Salesmen.

Subscribed and sworn to before me this 1st day of July 1923.

J. E. Greenslade

Notary.

NOTARY PUBLIC COOK COUNTY, ILL.

Thousands Have Proved It!

For instance, A. H. Ward, Chicago, earned $1,350 last month. Has averaged $1,000 a month the last year. H. D. Miller, another Chicago boy, was making $100 a *month* as a stenographer in July 1922. In September, 3 months later, he he was making $100 a *week* as a salesman. W. P. Clenny of Kansas City, Mo., stepped from a $150 a month clerkship into a selling job at $500 a month. He is making $850 a month now. M. V. Stephens of Albany, Ky., was making $25 a week. He took up this training and now makes 5 times that much. J. H. Cash of Atlanta, Ga., exchanged his $75 a month job for one which pays him $500 a month. O. H. Malfroot of Boston, Mass., stepped into a $10,000 position as a SALES MANAGER—so thorough is this training. All these successes are due to this easy, fascinating and rapid way to master certain invincible secrets of selling.

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Sounds remarkable, doesn't it? Yet there is nothing remarkable about it. There are certain ways to approach different types of prospects to get their undivided attention—certain ways to stimulate keen interest—certain ways to overcome objections, batter down prejudices, outwit competition and make the prospect act. If you will learn these principles there is awaiting you a brilliant success and more money than you ever thought of earning.

As you will see by the affidavit to the left thousands of reputable selling organizations in America turn to this Association for their Salesmen. We can never take care of all the demands made on us for this better type of trained salesmen.

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Dept. 4-R, 53 W. Jackson Blvd. Chicago, Ill.

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Please send me without obligation on my part your free book, "Modern Salesmanship" which will enable me to test my ability at home, and full information about the N. S. T. A. System of Salesmanship Training and Employment Service.

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How would you like to be two to three inches thinner in waist, hips and thighs one week from today? The Madame X self-massaging girdle actually takes off 3 to 10 inches and makes you *look* thinner the moment you put it on. No starving diets—no tiring exercises—no dangerous medicines—no weakening baths. Removes fat while you walk, play, work or sit.

HERE is the scientific Madame X Girdle that slenderizes your figure the moment you put it on! That instantly gives you fashion's trim, graceful lines, and actually reduces your waist and hips almost "while you wait!" Makes you *look* thin while *getting* thin.

For the Madame X, which is worn over the undergarment as a corset, fits you as smoothly and snugly as a kid glove, and is so constructed that it fits right into the figure and touches and gently massages every inch of the surface continually. See how it holds in the hips and thighs as well as the abdomen. How it comes well up over the diaphragm and supports the muscles of the back and sides, helping prevent fatigue. The front cut-out insures perfect comfort while you sit, work or play. And the special lacing in the back makes it easy to adjust as you become more slender. The garters hold the Madame X firmly in place, so that while you may enjoy a maximum freedom of motion, your entire figure is held in firmly and the body is kept erect and well-poised.


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Actually Massages Away Fat

Madame X Reducing Girdle is built on scientific massage principles that have caused reductions of 5, 10, 20 pounds in an amazingly short time. It is made of dry heat cured, resilient, "live" rubber, especially designed for reducing purposes and strong enough to really hold you in. The rubber is the same kind that is recommended by famous athletic coaches and Health authorities as a safe and healthy way to reduce.

The Madame X is worn over the undergarment so that no rubber touches you. Yet with every breath, with every step, with every little motion it actually massages away the fat! For through your undergarment the live rubber gently grips and kneads the excess fat so it is actually eased away. Only *live* rubber can produce this marvelous "unconscious massage."

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Once you try on the Madame X you won't want to take it off. See how it makes you look more slender at once. Enjoy the comfort of it, the sense of ease and poise it gives you. Why not go to the nearest dealer and see this remarkable girdle for yourself? Try it on and see how you like it—no obligation.

Also be sure to see the Madame X Brassiere which does for the upper figure what the Girdle does for waist, hips and thighs.

Write for Free Booklet, "The New Healthful Way to Reduce," which explains in detail how the Madame X makes you *look* thin while *getting* thin. Address Dept. G-4610.

MADAME X COMPANY, Inc.

410 Fourth Ave., New York City

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These excerpts are from just a few of the thousands of letters we have received from delighted users. The original letters in our files may be seen at any time by anyone interested.

"I think the reducing girdle is fine. I reduced 7 inches in hips and thighs and 5 inches in the waist."
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"I have reduced my waist to 29 inches from 36. I wear the girdle all day and wouldn't be without it."
Mrs. E. G. Dalueka,
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"The Madame X is too wonderful for words. I was 51 around my waist—now I am 39. My hips were 66 before using the girdle and are now 49."
Mrs. Vida Sheidler,
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"Have been wearing the Madame X Girdle for three weeks. Have taken 5 inches from my waist and 4½ inches from hips. No more corsets for me."
(Miss) Belle Folsom,
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Madame X Reducing Girdle

Makes You Look Thin While Getting Thin

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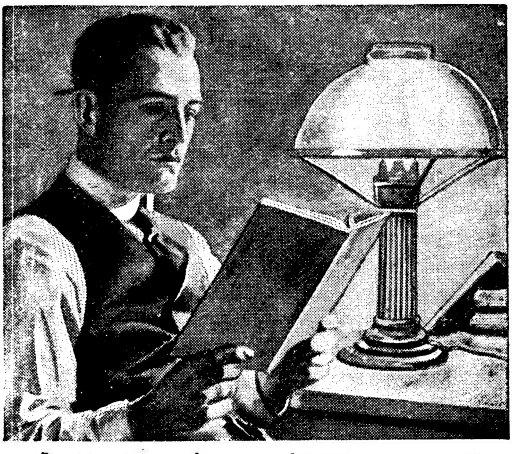

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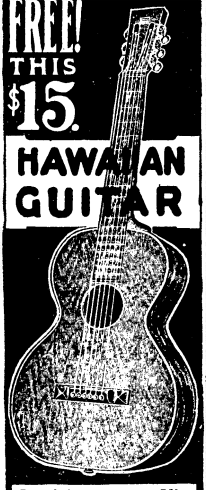

ONLY 4 MOTIONS used in playing the fascinating Hawaiian Guitar. Our native Hawaiian instructors teach you to master them quickly. Pictures show how. Everything explained clearly.

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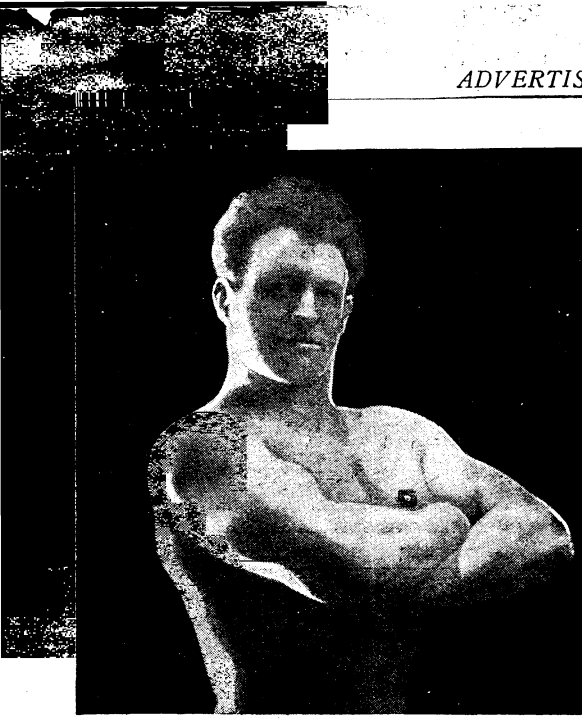

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The strongest man living at last divulges the method that enabled him to acquire strength. This new method now brings the real promise of health, strength and power to even scrawny weaklings. And the simplicity of it will amaze you!

Andrew Passannant himself one of the world's strongest men--prizewinner in contests of strength--a student of physical culture--tells how he was astonished at Breitbart's method--and how it surpasses previous methods.

Never before has such news been released in the world of physical training!

I have known of Breitbart for years. But I never before realized what a superb physical specimen he is. His feats of strength are astounding—unequalled! He drives nails through oak planks with his fists. He bends silver dollars between thumb and finger. He sustains more weight or lifts more than any living man. He bends steel bands around his arm like so much ribbon.

And as a young man he was a puny weakling. For years Breitbart has kept his method secret. "Anyone who knows my method can do what I can," he says. But now he wants the world of men, hungry for strength, to know. He has made his fortune and he is satisfied. So now, gladly, he has divulged his secret—he makes known the simplest strength-building method ever devised. Yet it is the most positive, quickest and successful of all known systems.

What Is This New Method?

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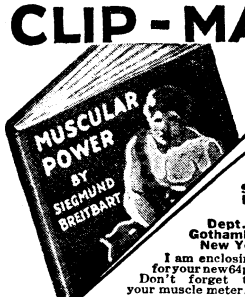

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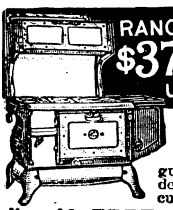

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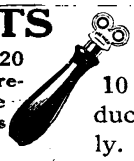

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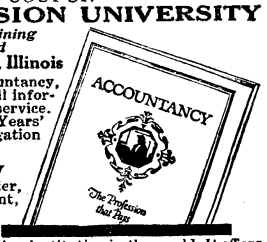

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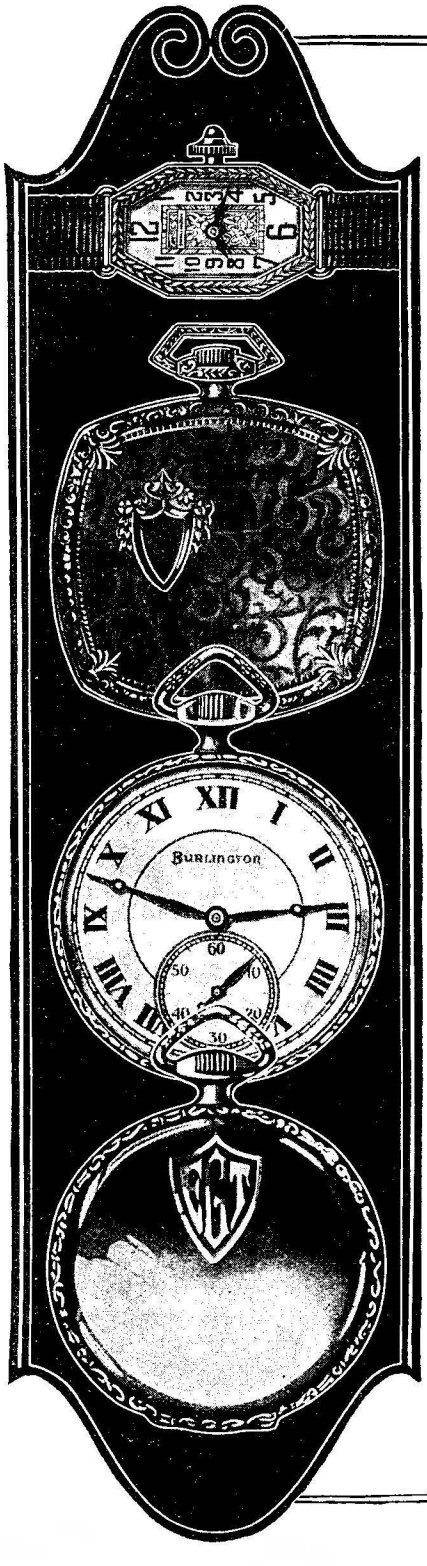

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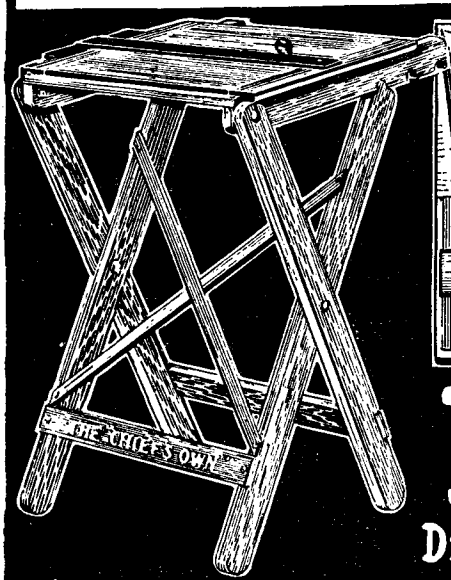

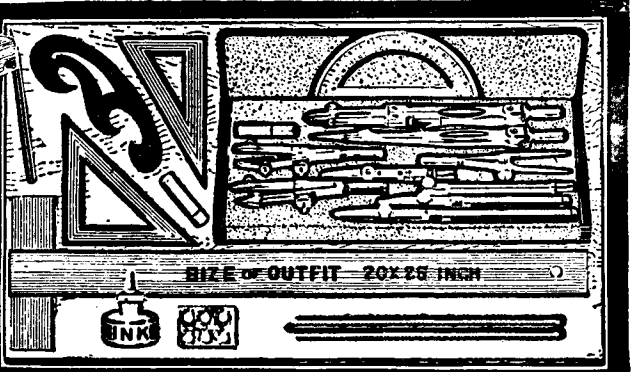

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Second Prize,	5.00,	Henry Guimond, 1750 Howen Ave., East Cleveland, Ohio. *For letter submitted on Burlington Watch.*
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The Advertising Department is most grateful to the many thousands of readers who so generously responded to the invitation to make a "better job" of our Advertising Department.

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Niagara Falls, N. Y.

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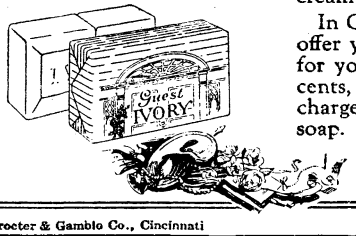


TWICE-A-MONTH

Complete Story Magazine

With which is combined PEOPLE'S MAGAZINE

Vol. I | October 10, 1924 | No. 4

No Questions Asked

By Maxwell Smith

A COMPLETE NOVEL.

THE JEWELS WERE GONE. SCANLON AND ROWLAND, THE DETECTIVES, SWORE ONE OF MRS. FINDLAY'S SERVANTS HAD DONE IT. BUT VIC MORRISON, ADEPT AT THE DOUBLE CROSS, SAID THEY WERE INNOCENT. ONLY "BEANS" DALEY KNEW WHO THE REAL THIEF WAS—AND HE WAS TELLING NOBODY. . . .

CHAPTER I.

THE village police chief and the private detectives couldn't see together. An inside job, said the agency operatives promptly and in large degree arbitrarily. A porch-climber's trick, said the chief with just as much reason.

"Porch climber nothing," pronounced Scanlon, the talkative one of the agency men. "Why, say! if second-story workers earned all the medals that're pinned on them they'd have to be running around as thick as bootleggers. First crack out the box that's always the yell in a job like this—porch climbers! What d'you think a porch climber is, anyhow? He's a good thief, he is, or he don't get away with it. The good ones don't grow up like weeds—not in that line, they don't. Take a look and figure for yourself.

"Count 'em up, the Class A second-story men that prowl while folks are home like the folks were here. Go ahead—count 'em up! And if you find more of them than could hold a convention in a sedan any afternoon I'll take you for a ride around the world on my back. Take my word for it, brother, there ain't over a dozen in these United States who can rank

Class A—and half of that dozen is in jail. Uh-huh! This here's an inside job if you'll listen to me and see it that way."

"I'm listening," said the chief, "but I don't hear you saying what was to hinder one of the dozen you're talking about—or one of the half dozen, either, not counting them you say're in jail—from stopping off here in Hazelbrook and making a little call like we've just had. No, sir, I don't hear you. Suppose," he smiled slyly, "that you talk it over with all the Class A porch climbers you're so well acquainted with just to make sure for certain that none of them had a hand in. Seems like that'd be a good way to sort of show us folks we're wrong in thinking somebody from the outside come along and pulled the job. I'd look them up quick myself if I knew where to lay my fingers on them like you do."

Scanlon smiled over the prickly challenge. He didn't expect a hick cop to understand that it would take a day or two—or maybe three—to locate these few members of the elect who were worthy of suspicion in a case such as this.

"I'd do that, old-timer," he said, "if it wasn't that the job lies right here between the front and back lawns of the Findlay place. If you'd built a fence around the house right after the thing happened the dame would have her jewelry and you'd have a boarder in your little bastile. But now"—he made the motion of casting something to the winds—"we're dragging along fifteen hours late and anybody knows what that means. Give a crook fifteen minutes and he can sink the stuff a mile deep. Give him fifteen hours like this bird has got and he can get it clear through to China."

The chief cocked an eye on the noonday sun. He couldn't see that the matter of how far the loot might have traveled held much for profitable debate at this juncture. In his humble opinion it was more to the point to discover who had emptied Mrs. Burdette Findlay's jewel cases. Until some clew as to the identity of the thief was found what use could there be in speculating about the whereabouts of the jewelry? How could it be traced when nobody knew who had taken it?

To the sun the chief confided his disappointment in Scanlon and his partner Rowland. He had felt the burden being lifted from his shoulders when Mrs. Burdette Findlay announced that detectives were coming from New York. He was no detective; he knew that. Therefore he had welcomed these experienced men and experienced real assistance — aye, enlightenment — from them.

But now, having seen them in action for three hours and heard their conclusion that this patently was an inside job, his expectation faded. They apparently couldn't see any deeper into the situation than he could. Not so deep if they persisted in looking for the thief among the members of the household. He knew better than that. His net gain from their presence, then, was the conditional promise of a ride around the world on another man's back! An unattractive prize; it couldn't be comfortable.

While the chief communed with the sun the two detectives frowned moodily on the rambling bungalow that was Mrs. Burdette Findlay's summer home on the shore of Long Island Sound. Across the quiet water floated fine-scattered streamers of low-hanging mist. Long Island was a haze in the distance, obscure as their own ideas concerning the robbery they were called upon to solve.

Following their interrogation of everybody in the house, they had just completed an examination of the building itself and the extensive grounds surrounding it. The sum total of their knowledge had not thereby been in-

creased. They knew precisely what they had been told upon their arrival: that fifty-odd thousand dollars' worth of jewels had been stolen and that the thief apparently had entered through a window on the second floor. Under the circumstances, with nothing to point them in any other direction, they took the easiest way and hitched their wagon to the simple theory that this was an inside job. Why not? This was as good a guess as any and it gave them something to look busy about when otherwise they could only go wandering in the highways and byways paging the thief!

"You'll be arresting somebody pretty soon, won't you?" ventured the chief, voicing the obvious corollary to their contention. "D'you mind giving a hint who it'll be? I won't butt in, you understand. I'm just curious."

Without intending to be so frank, Scanlon stated the glaring difficulty: "Who we going to arrest? The bird that glommed the stuff has it all salted away, didn't I just tell you? We're not rushing any—not now. If we had the chance you had to clean up the case while it was fresh that'd be different. The way it is, we're going slow until we turn up something right."

"Anyhow," said his partner, Rowland, rousing from the profound silence into which he was wont to fall when, as not infrequently happened, his mind went blank, "we've got to sell the real dope to that fool dame"—meaning Mrs. Burdette Findlay—"before we can jump our man. You've got her all steamed up on this porch-climber stuff so she can't see anything else."

"But we found where he got into the house," said the chief, diffidently. "You've seen for yourself that the screen was pushed out of the window——"

"Any dumb-bell would've had brains enough to do that," snorted Scanlon. "Any dumb-bell. Don't it strike you as funny, brother," he enlarged patiently, "that this porch climber of yours busted right straight into the room where the stuff was? Huh! Climbed straight in where he wanted to get without missing a step, didn't he? Couldn't've done better if he'd known right where he was going, could he? I'll say he couldn't!"

"He may have been lucky," said the chief, "or he may have been watching the house and discovered which was Mrs. Findlay's room. They do that, don't they, the Class A thieves?"

"Yah!" said Scanlon derisively. "Maybe he stopped in and asked the dame herself where was her room and when was she going to leave her junk lying around loose for a fellow to pick up. Or maybe he phoned her and asked her to leave the stuff lying around as a favor. Or maybe he sat out here on the lawn, spending a couple of days on each side of the house until he got the layout down pat. And then again maybe he didn't have to go to any bother like that at all. Maybe he knew right where to head in without thinking about it, the same as anybody belonging around the house would know."

The chief seemed abashed before such superior reasoning but he hinted again: "You've got your eye on somebody, though, haven't you? I thought you were aiming at the chauffeur."

Scanlon pursed his lips knowingly while Rowland came out of his profound silence to inquire, "Huh?"

"The chauffeur," repeated the chief. "Now that boy didn't have anything to do with it. I've known him all his life. He belongs here, you see. And he's been driving for Mrs. Findlay three or four years. She hired him when the chauffeur quit while she was here one summer. He's honest, that boy, dead honest. 'Sides, he don't live in the house—don't ever go in it much, I guess. His quarters are over there in the garage."

"Sure," said Scanlon, "they're all honest—dead honest—until they see a chance to turn a trick. That's the big trouble with the damn' case—that fool dame thinks everybody she knows is honest. She wants her stuff back but she don't let us fellows go after it the way we want to.

" 'Oh, no, he wouldn't steal,' she says when you asked her about this bird or other. 'Oh, no, she wouldn't steal,' she says when you ask her about this dame or other.

" 'Oh, no,' says I, 'of course they wouldn't'—but go ahead and show me a damn' one of 'em that won't hook onto anything as looks good any time there's nobody looking. So we're going to do our stuff in our own little way, old-timer, never minding her 'Oh-no's;' and if you don't get yourself lost somewheres chasing your porch climber we'll give you a ring when we get things all lined up."

The chief seemed grateful but he smiled quietly at the sun. He had always supposed that detectives could see things not visible to the human eye—that is, not visible to the eyes of common every-day humans. He was disappointed, very, but soothed his disillusionment with the thought that as detectives this twain couldn't be much. He didn't give proper value to the fact that the thief in the present instance had left no trace aside from the empty jewel cases and the dislodged window screen for any eye, human or unhuman, to discern.

CHAPTER II.

Vic Morrison and Jake Kramer were young men of rather deceitfully unassuming appearance but recently come out of the West. Not the wide open spaces; no. All they knew of these lyricized chunks of geography that are so popularly reputed to breed "men" was what they had gleaned from the movies and by gazing from car windows on their journey eastward. The only thought they gave to the man-building prairies and mountains and such was a practical thought having to do solely with the number of miles traveled. They didn't count the miles all in a row—their haste at the outset was not so great as to demand a clear transcontinental leap—but by stages whenever it appeared that they had outworn their welcome in the several places whereat they exercised stop-over privileges. They lived on the country en route and lost nothing by so doing.

Yet though alien to the far-famed spaces they were themselves men of more than usual parts—in their own especial way. They had come out of the West for their own good, prudently; nor had their departure done the West any noticeable harm. As a secondary reason for their migration there was an itch to ply their lately cultivated art in New York City. Morrison knew the terrane well and had been away long enough to be forgotten by any police officer who might have had a desire to meet him. And he had a brand-new racket which he modestly believed should go bigger in and around the Big Town than anywhere else. Experiments conducted in San Francisco and points East had so demonstrated.

Pleasantly refreshed, Morrison awoke along toward noon on the day following the robbery of Mrs. Burdette Findlay's place on the Sound. Collecting the morning papers from outside the door of the three-room apartment they occupied uptown, he proceeded to absorb a sketchy idea of the news by skimming over the headlines. The tale of the robbery quickly caught and held his eye. He read it through, and through again. Grinning, he went into the adjoining room and prodded the slumbering Kramer in the ribs.

"Up, Jake, up!" he urged. "Here's our dish served with gravy. Wake up and get it."

Kramer rolled over and pulled the covers about his head. He liked to sleep and somehow he didn't like New York. His way they'd have been in Chicago where the pickings were just as good and which he knew like a book.

"Gravy," chuckled Morrison, stripping the covers from the sleeper, "for us. Here's where we show the Big Town something it's never met before, Jake. Hey, wake up!"

Kramer sat up reluctantly, knuckling his eyes, rumpling his hair, rubbing his ears and the back of his neck.

"Let's forget it," he grumbled, "whatever it is, and grab a rattler for Chi. A-a-ya-ah!" he yawned cavernously.

"We'll think about Chi after we turn this one off," Morrison promised diplomatically. Jake was a good pal and a nervy worker so, while it was hard to understand, his preference for Chicago had to be mildly humored. "We'll make Chicago next on the list, Jake, but now listen. Here's an act all set up pretty for us. All we've got to do is knock it over. Get your eyes open and look, will you."

Kramer blinked at the indicated headlines but failed to reflect Morrison's enthusiasm.

"Uh-huh." He lay down again. "That's no call to break me out of bed, Vic. What time is it?"

"Time to get started. How much do we claim? Ten thousand ought to be easy. Too easy. Let's make it fifteen."

"The junk probably isn't worth that much," said Kramer pessimistically. "If the papers say there's sixty thousand dollars' worth that means about a dime. Remember back in Detroit——"

"This is on the level," interrupted Morrison, hushing the fumble they had made in Detroit when the loot in an alleged forty-thousand-dollar jewel robbery turned out to be worth less than four thousand. "I've got a hunch, Jake. And this Findlay hen is bidding five thousand reward—that listens good, doesn't it?"

"Yeh," commented Kramer quoting the familiar form. "Five thousand reward for the arrest and conviction——"

"And no questions asked," Morrison corrected. "Five thousand, Jake, get that—an' no questions asked. If she's willing to give up five thousand like that, it's safe to lay that her junk is worth what the papers say—or pretty near. That's our cue to raise the ante. If she'll pay five she'll pay ten and maybe fifteen. Anyhow we can start at fifteen and meet her halfway at ten. Then with carfare to burn, we'll talk about Chicago."

"You're talking like Woolworth now —five-ten-fifteen," said Kramer, "or a guy dealing years out the book. I don't like this town, Vic——"

Nevertheless he swung his legs over the side of the bed and sat up with some evidence of growing interest.

"Let's hear the rest of it."

"There's no frills," said Morrison. "The hen and some other birds she's had to dinner are gabbing downstairs when somebody drifts into her room and lifts the stuff—a thirty-five-thousand-dollar string of beads, half a dozen rings and a couple of pins and things. She finds the cases empty when she runs up for a minute about nine o'clock. Her maid says everything was O. K. when she was in the room ten or fifteen minutes ago. Only trace they find of the prowler is an open window screen. That's the story, Jake, and if there ever was a dish ordered up for us this is it."

"It sounds all right," said Kramer grudgingly, "but—— It's out in the country, isn't it? That don't sound so good."

Morrison nodded reassuringly. "It's about thirty miles up the Sound but that's all right, too. Better than if it was close to town. I know the coun-

try up there—this Hazelbrook place. I hopped bells one summer in a hotel right beside it and used to snoop along the shore gaping at the swell cottages and wishing somebody would give me a bid to sit in."

Jake Kramer grinned. "You didn't expect them to poison their own soup, did you?"

"Nope," said Morrison cheerfully, "and they never did that I know of. Stir yourself, Jake, and let's get to work. We want to get in touch with the hen to-night so we can get an answer in the morning."

Taking the paper and reading the story through, Kramer echoed the position taken by Detectives Scanlon and Rowland at practically the very moment they were ridiculing the Hazelbrook police chief's porch-climber theory.

"Looks to me like that maid and the chauffeur were in on it. He drove a couple of guests away, you notice, just before the dame discovered she was shy her jewelry. How about the maid passing the stuff to him and him digging it in after delivering his party?"

"What if she did?" shrugged Morrison. "What if he did? The stuff is gone, isn't it? That's all we care."

"But if the cops give these two a regular drill they're going to give up, aren't they? The dame says they've been with her for years and are all right. That means they're amateurs and sure to bust when the screws are put on. Then what do we get?"

"We get a bust too," said Morrison, "but what's that matter? All we'll be out is a couple of postage stamps. We'll gamble that far, Jake, for ten thousand—maybe fifteen. Keep in your head that there's five thousand already hung up with no questions asked and figure how easy it is."

Kramer proceeded with the business of getting up but he had a further gloomy word to say.

"Five grand as the bunk to kid that maid and chauffeur along—or as a deadfall set for the sore guy that got the short end if it was an outside job."

"Try a spot of that Hoboken Scotch," advised Morrison; "it can't make you feel any worse, Jake. And while you're nailing the crape on the door I'll dope the letter to the hen. Then I'm going to chase up to her place and join the sleuth army. I don't see any rules," he grinned, "that bar a private investigator like myself. The reward makes it a free-for-all, including the correspondence-school boys. Don't let me forget my shiny gold shield, Jake. Everybody that sees it thinks I'm Burns himself in disguise and calls me chief!"

CHAPTER III.

Also about noon on this same day one "Beans" Daley snapped out of a restless slumber on a dirty mattress on the dirty floor of a dirty room in a dirty tenement not so far from New York City Police Headquarters. A heavy step halting just outside his door was what roused him.

Wide-eyed and with lips writhing in a silent snarl he jerked up to crouch on an elbow while his right hand snaked out with a gun pointing toward the door.

Had any one entered or even tried to enter, Daley quite probably would have fired. Quite as probably he would have missed. The condition that made his finger contract dangerously on the trigger also made his arm uncertain. To put himself in shape to use a cannon he was sadly in need of an altogether different kind of shot. He had slept too long and overstayed his limit on the dope.

The footsteps moved on, their further progress explaining the momentary hesitation which had alarmed him. A drunk. Sure. He should have known it couldn't be anybody else.

Automatically his fingers started on their usual waking errand into his vest pocket for the dope that would jack him up again. The real stuff—see? No fifty-fifty milk of magnesia nor borax nor marble dust nor nothing like that. He knew the right people along Grand Street and got the real stuff—see?

But for once another thought took precedence. His shaking hands dug into one of the holes in the ticking. He grinned with a reciprocal twitch flitting from his left eye to the corner of his mouth and whispered to himself between sucking intakes of breath. Then he sniffed his dope and lay back, still grinning but with a diminishing twitch between eye and lip, still whispering but with less slobbery inhalation.

Daley was "Beans," contemptuously, because that exemplified his regular portion. He didn't mean anything—not to anybody except the dope sellers who found certain uses for him at times. He was just a hophead, a dope, a furtive moocher, a sneak thief. But now! Say, couldn't he show the bums something—if he wanted to!

His hand dug again into the mold-clotted stuffing of the mattress—pitiful hiding place—to linger on his first worth-while plunder. He wanted to bring out the string of pearls, the rings and pins with their gleaming jewels, and gloat over them—Mrs. Burdette Findlay's jewels. Not now, though. He must be careful, careful. Somebody might get a glimpse through the window—through a window that would have to be scraped before any one ever could see through it! He had something here to make the bums' eyes stick out, hadn't he? If he wanted to!

Beans Daley believed that he had robbed Mrs. Burdette Findlay's bungalow. That wasn't strictly true. The dope that was in him had committed the robbery. If he hadn't been coked up to the eyebrows it wouldn't have happened. Without the extra shot he had taken he would have fled from the prospect of flying so high.

The robbery was, in the main, an accident. Beans Daley was away off his beat, a circumstance that had come about quite simply thus:

Doing nothing and with nothing to do, he was on the corner of Grand Street and the Bowery when it tickled the fancy of Tony Granelli to show him what the scenery was like north of Twenty-third Street. Granelli was in his car on the way to visit some of his road-house trade anent the sale of liquor.

"Hey, Beans," he hailed, "wanta take a ride?"

Daley was flattered but dubious.

"Sure," he said but qualified the acceptance by remaining on the sidewalk and asking, "Where you going?"

"Uptown a ways," said Granelli. "Hop in."

Daley started to get into the car, then hesitated. Granelli might be figuring on using him some way. He wanted to know about that.

"You got something on, Tony?" he grinned ingratiatingly. "What you want me for?"

"I'm blowing you to a joy ride, thassall," said Granelli impatiently. "Come on, hop in."

And because it pleased his vanity to be seen riding with Tony Granelli—a man of standing—Beans Daley hopped in.

True, his misgivings returned when he saw the street numbers reeling by in sixties, seventies, eighties—one hundreds! Crossing the Harlem River on Madison Avenue at One Hundred and Thirty-eighth Street brought to him the dread of an alien and probably hostile land! He wanted to get out but Granelli, enjoying his passenger's unease, laughed and shoved the speedometer up a notch. Through the far reaches of the Bronx Daley begged to set down. As they rolled into open country be-

yond the city limits his nerves were tattered and demanded fixing. He treated them generously. That helped but didn't wholly allay his fear of this far, strange country.

When Granelli stopped at a road house ten miles out to conduct his business, Beans Daley would have quit—if he had known where he was and how to get back to Grand Street. Not knowing, he had to stick and endure fresh agonies as Granelli drove still farther into the country.

Came the materialization of all his fears when he was cast adrift. This came about very simply when Granelli met a couple of friends in a road house. They had a proposition that interested him. He was going with them and might not get back to New York for two or three days. He couldn't see dragging Daley along. So he dumped Daley at a railroad station, slipped him a ten-dollar note and told him that any southbound train would land him in Grand Central Terminal.

The station at which he was abandoned, however, chanced to be Hazelbrook, where few trains stopped except during the commuting hours. He had three hours to wait for a New York train.

Beans Daley's nerves required more than soothing them. They clamored to be embalmed! He took care of them desperately.

As the dope took hold he found courage to explore the wilderness. Why the hell shouldn't he take a look around? There wasn't nobody had nothing on him. He wasn't going to bite anybody, anyhow, and there wasn't nobody going to bite him. He drifted over to the Shore Road and ultimately to the beach.

The summer residences attracted him—joints bigger'n police headquarters in the middle of lots bigger'n Union Square! And, jes' lookut all the trees and grass and flowers and everything! And lookut the boats out there—crazy boats with sails that looked like they was tipping over and big classy motorboats. Jes'——

Had Daley known that the beach was private property he would have shied away from it. Not because he had any respect for the property of others but because he was in unfamiliar territory. Unaware that he was trespassing, but nevertheless cautiously, he went along the beach because there he could watch the boats and at the same time have a better view of the cottages than could be had from the road.

As the time lengthened without any one bothering him he began to enjoy himself as much as he could enjoy anything besides dope. He sniffed more than usual, of course, being under the strain of excitement and an underlying fear of his strange surroundings which rapidly burned up the effect of the drug. He had to fuel his courage to continue his enjoyment of the scene. And to feed the thoughts that came to him of what he would do if he could only get a crack at one of these joints that were bigger'n police headquarters. The dope was talking and shortly he helped it talk with another shot.

Beans Daley reached a dangerous stage of overstimulation. Given a chance he could show the bums a regular trick—the bums who addressed him as "Hey, Beans!" or "Hey, Dope!" if they ever addressed him at all. He could show them—and maybe he would. Suppose he went back to New York with a bagful! That would show up the bums, wouldn't it?

Coked up to reckless pitch he dwelt on the idea, forgetful of the passage of time. He had the nerve to put over a trick—sure he had—if he wanted to!

Suddenly he noticed that the shadows of the trees under which he sat were lengthening on the beach. His doped courage oozed. Cripes! Here he was to hell and gone, heavens knows where, out among the sticks and it was getting

dark! Dark—them there damn' trees making passes at him and Grand Street Heaven knows how far away! Cripes!

It was a moment for drastic remedy and he didn't stint the dose. His warped desire to show the bums was touched off! A palpitating minute to crystallize his decision and he circled toward the nearest house. The ground floor was illuminated but there was no light upstairs on the ocean front nor on the side toward which he maneuvered. That suited him—everybody downstairs and nobody up above where the pickings were most likely to be found in the bedrooms.

He was on the kitchen side of the house. A screen door gave him a view of a hallway with the backstairs leading upward just inside the door. The gentle clatter of dishes in the kitchen was all he could hear. He saw no one.

The door yielded to a turn of the knob. On the threshold he hesitated, wishing for a gun. A gun for what? He didn't need a gun—he was good enough without one. Shutting the door noiselessly, he crept up the stairs.

The first room he entered was Mrs. Burdette Findlay's. There still was light enough for him to make out the sheen of silver and gold on the dressing table. His hands were hovering to select when his dilated eyes caught the glitter of diamonds—rings in a tray and two bar pins stuck in a silver-mesh cushion with the carelessness of accustomed security. As he pocketed this ready loot he realized the significance of the flat leather cases that lay in front of him—jewel cases!

Beans Daley was not experienced in burglary; he lacked the essential qualifications for the profession. He wasn't even a good thief; only a sneak, a petty pilferer. But he had wit enough to guard against leaving his card—fingerprints. He handled the jewel cases in a fold of the fine lace scarf that was on the dressing table. Three were empty; those belonging to the jewels Mrs. Burdette Findlay was wearing. From others he obtained the string of pearls, a diamond wrist watch and an emerald pendant. The pearls he wasn't sure about—they might be phony—but the diamonds looked all right. He figured he had done well enough. It was time to get out.

The opening of the screen in the window through which it later appeared that he had entered was the result of a gust of fear that he could not get downstairs and out of the house undetected. But after sliding two of the four bolts that held the screen to the outside of the window frame he saw that to go this way he must descend to the roof of a veranda, he drew back. There might be some one underneath at the very point he chose to drop to the ground. Taking what seemed the lesser risk he went down the stairs, out and away.

With such ridiculous ease and by accident was the robbery committed. By accident, because it would not have taken place if Tony Granelli hadn't amused himself by carting Beans Daley into the country; if Tony Granelli hadn't changed his program and dumped him in Hazelbrook.

And contrary to the testimony of milady's maid, Daley had more than fifteen minutes' start. Through an honest misconception of time the girl said that the jewels had been there ten or fifteen minutes before Mrs. Burdette Findlay discovered their loss. Had she said half an hour she would have been nearer correct.

When the robbery was revealed, Daley had been on his way for twenty-five minutes. At the moment he was nearing Portchester, ten miles away, aboard a truck on which he had with the boldness of desperation begged a lift. Reaction was tearing at him then, the terror of a rabbit hunted far from his familiar burrows. A terror that was

not decreased by the fact that his supply of the necessary and sustaining drug was becoming low.

In Portchester he found some relief—a train just leaving for New York. Another hour and he was on Grand Street, replenishing his dope and borrowing a gun with which to guard his treasure. He'd show the bums!

CHAPTER IV.

Scanlon and Rowland had some justification for the complaint that Mrs. Burdette Findlay was hindering their operations by refusing to permit the centering of suspicion upon either her maid or chauffeur. Even when the detectives made a direct issue on this point, declaring that they couldn't be expected to produce results unless allowed to work in their own way, she remained obdurate.

"But there's nothing else to the case," said Scanlon, exasperated. "You're sure none of your guests got away with the stuff because they weren't out of your sight. You're sure none of the other servants got away with it because they weren't off the ground floor and were in your sight or in sight of each other all the time. That leaves only your maid who was upstairs and the chauffeur who was around somewheres outside the house, don't it?"

"It leaves them, yes," madame smiled coldly, "and the thief. I wish you would focus on him please. He is the person we're most concerned with."

"We're doing that but you won't let us," retorted Scanlon, while Rowland nodded out of his profound silence. "Believe me, lady, this is bunk about a porch climber turning off the works. We've been all over the roof of that porch again with everything but telescopes and there ain't a scratch to show anybody climbed up there. Nor on the window ledge neither—not a scratch. And that screen now—— It fastens top and bottom with little bolts, don't it? Well, how d'you account for only two of the bolts being unlocked? With the two on the other side locked the way they are you can't open the screen wide enough for a man to get in or out. Not without ripping the woodwork or bending the locked bolts, you can't. And, anyhow, the bolts are on the inside, ain't they? Then how could anybody on the outside shoot any of them back to get in without cutting the wire to get at them? I don't see any cuts in the wire."

Scanlon and Rowland had indeed been studying the case!

Mrs. Burdette Findlay, however, declined to argue and even to offer an opinion on this feature.

"My understanding," she said, "was that you gentlemen were qualified to read such details. I'm sure I'm not. That's why you were engaged."

"We read 'em all right, lady," asserted Scanlon, sourly earnest, "and if you'll let's put that chauffeur and the girl over the humps for a couple of hours we'll show you we've got it all squared up. Listen, lady, here's about how they worked it," he said, presenting the latest creation of his own and his partner's brains; which wasn't at all foolish: "The girl handled the job on the inside and opened the screen to sling the stuff down to him. She didn't have to take the screen out entirely to do that. Pulling back the bolts on one side let it give enough for her to get a hand through and lower the bundle. Then he got away with it when he shoved off with the folks that left your party just before you found you'd been robbed.

"And that would have been all right too and pretty good as a stunt if she'd had head enough to take the whole screen out or cut holes in it anyhow, to make it look like somebody on the outside got at the bolts. That's how these amateurs always fall down, lady.

If they don't make their hand so good that anybody can see where they robbed the deck, why then they play what looks like a top straight until somebody shows 'em the king ain't there. They went all wrong on that screen business, all wrong. A good worker would've cut the wire out and never minded about the bolts. See?"

"I see," said madame, looking bored, "but, frankly, I'm not impressed. I have the most implicit confidence in both my maid and my driver. I really wish you would realize that. I'm sure it would save valuable time."

Scanlon stuck out his jaw and glowered.

"Then you don't care if you don't get your stuff back, huh?"

Her tone dropped below zero. "Just what do you mean by that, please?"

"Well——" Scanlon shuffled uncomfortably in the frost, remembering that he was talking to a client. "Well," he apologized in a kind of way, "I didn't mean anything—only that if we're kept handcuffed and gagged we can't guarantee any results. We've got to work in our own way, you understand——"

"I think I understand," she smiled distantly. "You mean that you are giving up the case?"

"No, lady, no; nothing like that," Scanlon disclaimed hastily, thinking of his job and the five thousand dollars reward in which he stood a chance of getting a cut.

Similar thoughts startled Rowland into speech echoing his partner's, to which he added: "You leave it to us, ma'am, and we'll make out. We don't aim to pick on anybody—don't think anything like that. The way we've put the case up to you is just the way it look from one angle. We've got to figure it from every side, you understand, and then we figure down to the right angle. That's how we work, ma'am, you understand. Elimination, that's what. But we're fair and open-minded. We haven't got our minds made up yet."

"I'd thank you," she said dryly, "if you would make up your minds that there has been a robbery here and that nobody belonging to my household had any part in it. Do think of that." She smiled and left them.

"She's damn' anxious to steer us," said Scanlon as she passed beyond earshot. "I wonder—say, how about this being a fake? She looks like money but you never can tell. I'm going to tip the office to look up how much insurance she's got on her junk."

"That's an idea," nodded Rowland.

Which proved in a manner that they were in fact open-minded!

CHAPTER V.

Motoring out to Hazelbrook that afternoon in a hired roadster which seemed enough like prosperity to get by, Vic Morrison, shiny gold shield and all, introduced himself to Mrs. Burdette Findlay as a representative of the Universal Private Investigation Bureau.

That, as Scanlon of the Moon agency might have said, was all right, too. All right, that is, in so far as there actually was such a thing as the Universal Investigation Bureau. And any one who paid the tariff for a correspondence course in ancient and modern dectectology was entitled to declare himself its duly authorized representative. That was all it promised, but never mind. Vic Morrison had paid the freight because he was able to use the solid gold-plated shield—fifteen dollars extra—in his business at times, as now.

Mrs. Burdette Findlay granted him an audience readily. Her contact with Scanlon and Rowland had given her the notion that it might be well to get a detective on the job. Vic Morrison's claim that he was one could not be any greater stretch of the imagination

than that of the men she already had hired. He was, besides, a personable young man unadorned by either splay feet or fallen arches.

"I don't want to intrude, of course," he smiled as he accepted her invitation to a seat on the veranda, "and if you're satisfied that some one else already has the case lined up I'll step back into my car and trouble you no further. I say this at the outset because I see that there are officers on the ground"—referring to Scanlon and Rowland who had halted another deep conference on the lawn to stare at him darkly—"and I naturally am not in touch with the most recent developments. Do you mind telling me whether these are police or private detectives?"

"Private," said Mrs. Burdette Findlay with gentle irony, "very private, I'm afraid. And there are no developments. If you have read the account in the newspapers you know all that is known."

"So," nodded Morrison sympathetically. "Then I gather that there is no objection to my taking a hand in the case? We"—he spoke presumably for the great Universal Investigation Bureau—"ask no retainer or guaranty—no fee. The reward is sufficiently attractive to interest us. It is offered, I understand, unconditionally."

"Entirely so."

"It goes simply for the recovery of your property regardless of whether the thief or thieves are caught?"

"It does," she affirmed. "The moment my jewels are returned the five thousand dollars will be paid. The thief himself can bring them if he likes, without any danger of arrest. I'm not anxious to put any one in jail," she smiled, shuddering delicately; "I'd dream of him."

Vic Morrison wagged his head in mild disapproval but comprehendingly.

"An admirably generous attitude, madame, but it wouldn't work well in wholesale practice. If everybody felt that way," he laughed, "I'd be inclined to turn crook myself. There wouldn't be much call for detectives, you know, and I'd have to live somehow. That aside, though, there's a point which probably hasn't occurred to you in connection with the recovery of your property. May I explain?"

She permitted him; he was quite an engaging young man and——

"As I said," he went on with a deprecatory gesture, "we are coming into the case on a straight basis of five thousand dollars or nothing. We're going after the reward because we think we're good enough to earn it. So far that's a plain business proposition, isn't it? Well! When you state—pardon me—that the reward is offered unconditionally do you make allowance for what we might call depreciation? By that I mean does the reward go only for the recovery of all your property or do you make allowance for a certain amount of it being unrecoverable?"

"That point had not occurred to me," she agreed. "I see what you mean, I think, but—go on."

"I'm considering," said the Universal Investigation Bureau graduate seriously, "the probability that the plunder has been divided. That part of it has been given as a cut to somebody we can't trace."

"Some one you can't trace," she repeated, recalling Scanlon's statement that crooks of big enough caliber to pull a job like this were few and far between. If their number was so limited wasn't it possible that this detective had a certain individual under suspicion? "Does that remark imply that you are thinking of some one who may be guilty that you can trace?"

Morrison shook his head. Seeking the confidence of his prospective victim he had to appear wholly ingenuous.

"I'm sorry to say that it does not," he replied. "There are, of course,

known thieves who specialize in this sort of robbery on whose movements we'll check up immediately. And"—he followed the guidance of the newspaper stories quoting her as being convinced of the innocence of her guests and servants—"from the newspaper reports of the case which you say are substantially correct, I'd say that some old-timer in the game did the trick. Some good crook who had marked you down and waited his chance."

He made a strike there.

"You don't believe it looks like an—ah—inside job?"

"I don't," said Morrison with just sufficient emphasis and a moment's pause before adding, "but that's a conclusion which closer examination of the facts may change."

The qualification was designed to avoid the appearance of "yessing" her. It got over and his stock went higher. With Vic Morrison on the case she looked forward to its solution!

"You were talking about the recovery of my jewels," she said. "Exactly what were you thinking of when you suggested that they might not all be recovered?"

"I was wondering on what amount of the total the full reward would be paid. You see, madam," his tone regretted the mention of cash, "we are in business——"

"I appreciate that," she said, waving away his explanation. "What you want to know is how many of my jewels must be recovered to earn the reward?"

"Yes. The reason I take this up is because the bulk of the property, apart from your pearls, consists of diamonds. Diamonds are very easily negotiable and when removed from their settings are generally beyond identification. It is practically certain that even if the thief were caught this minute some of the diamonds would be missing and never would be located. We're safe in assuming that he cashed in quickly on enough of them to provide himself with ready money. The necklace is a different proposition. He'll keep that intact and peddle it around looking for a price. The same with the bar pins, probably, and the more elaborate of the rings. They're worth more as they are than if they are broken up. Consequently, while we may be able to recover these, it's probable that some of the smaller pieces are gone for good. I'm bargaining now," he smiled, "to make our returns as big as possible should we succeed in the case. In a word, are you willing to write off, say, ten per cent and make the reward payable upon recovery of ninety per cent or more of your property?"

Mrs. Burdette Findlay was nobody's fool—but she was fooled this time. She was beguiled into the belief that the Universal Investigation Bureau, represented by Mr. Victor Morrison with the solid gold-plated shield at fifteen dollars extra, was even then close on the trail and could win back her pretties.

Although Mr. Morrison had frankly denied this, she considered herself astute in reading behind his denial something that wasn't there. Else why was he pinning her down so explicitly and with such confidence on the question of the reward? She might have suspected that he was planning to hold out part of the recovered loot but she didn't. He impressed her too favorably for that. And as he stated, it was not unreasonable to suppose that it would be well-nigh impossible to find all the stolen jewelry.

"That seems fair," she said, "as you state the situation. It is agreed, then, that the full reward will be paid upon production of ninety per cent of the jewels. If that much of them is found I'll count myself lucky."

She was fishing for more definite encouragement—for a glimpse of the lead being followed by the Universal Investigation Bureau—but was not an-

noyed when none was forthcoming. She rather admired Mr. Morrison's businesslike conservatism, which contrasted so splendidly with the arrogant dumbness of Scanlon and Rowland!

"Thank you, madame," bowed the solid gold-plated shield, inwardly chuckling over the progress he had made. "And let me assure you that we'll do all in our power to cut down your loss to a minimum. Ten per cent would make this a mighty expensive incident. Ten thousand dollars is a lot of money to drop for nothing."

His arithmetic puzzled her. "Ten thousand?"

"Yes. Ten per cent would be roughly five thousand, wouldn't it? And the five thousand reward."

"Oh." She got it but, to his delight, gave no evidence of concern. "To tell the truth," she confided, "I would gladly pay the five thousand for the return of my pearls alone. The other pieces can be easily replaced but not the pearls. There is a sentimental attachment—you understand?"

"Quite," murmured Morrison, but what he best understood at the moment was that he had just heard the music he'd been exerting himself to turn on. Five thousand—ten thousand dollars apparently didn't mean a thing in Mrs. Burdette Findlay's comparatively young life! And her beads had a mush value! What a chance to miss! If he hadn't been in such a rush——

Smothering a sigh, Vic Morrison got up to go through the motions of detecting! Having had some slight practice through several ventures on much the same order as this one, he did fairly well in spite of his diploma from the Universal Investigation Bureau, and his solid gold-plated shield!

Fairly well? Better than that. When shown how the window screen had been partly unfastened and given the benefit of Scanlon's observation, retailed by Mrs. Burdette Findlay herself, that there was not room enough for any one to squeeze through, he actually pointed out the route taken by Beans Daley in committing the robbery! This necessitated an explanation of the half-opened screen and he was right in that, too, declaring that the thief, perhaps during a moment of alarm, had started to go out that way and then backed up!

But in hitting upon these facts Vic Morrison had no notion how good he was. He was striving solely to intrench himself further in madame's confidence. She opened the way for him when, in reciting Scanlon's claim that the maid and chauffeur were guilty, she so evidently expected him to furnish something with which to combat the accusation.

Here was the chance to make himself solid. He grasped it and found little difficulty in creating the theory which pleased her—the truth! Scanlon and Rowland couldn't have missed it had they not been so stubbornly sure that this was an inside job done by the maid and the chauffeur. The facts blazoned it. That the thief did not come up the front stairs was known positively. That he did not enter by the window was almost equally certain. Leaving the maid and the chauffeur out of reckoning there was then but one alternative; the thief entered and left by the back stairs! Why not? There had been nothing to prevent him except an unlocked screen door.

Simple—yes, but Vic Morrison didn't believe it. In his heart he believed the Scanlon theory of maid and chauffeur in collusion. But an early solution of the crime would be far from suiting his purpose. So he did his bit to steer the hunt afar.

Mrs. Burdette Findlay welcomed his guess as though she were scoring a personal victory over her hired sleuths. They were slated instantly to be fired as incompetents but Morrison counseled against that. It was not within his

plan to chase the real detectives off the lot, nor yet to assume direction of the case as she requested when she consented to let the others remain. He had no intention of mixing in with other officers, private or regular, with whom it would be hard to maintain his four-flush. Wherefore he stipulated that he should play a lone hand.

"Put these other operatives on the right road and let them go ahead," he said. "You can't have too many men on the case. Get them out on the job—they're doing no good hanging around here. And you can tell them or not, as you please, that I'm at work, but I'd prefer that you don't go into details. I'd like to work under cover as much as possible."

She was all but hypnotized!

"That's entirely for you to say," she replied. "If you'd rather not have me tell who you are, I won't."

Vic Morrison frowned thoughtfully at his watch while he grinned behind his ears. She was eating out of his hand and he had the world by the tail! Fifteen thousand dollars! Easy!

"Don't tell them who I am," he said finally, "but drive them out on the job. Somebody must have seen the thief in the neighborhood—some suspicious-looking person, anyhow. Let them find that somebody and get a description. We'll need witnesses to make the identification when we make an arrest. How about the local police?" he went on before she could take up the inference that an arrest would not be long delayed. "Aren't they doing anything?"

"The village chief and a detective have been here," she said, "but I've no idea what they're doing. They left together a couple of hours ago, just before you arrived."

"Do they suspect any one in the house?"

"They didn't appear to."

Vic Morrison started to remove himself and his solid gold-plated shield. He had learned all he wanted to know; all there was to be learned.

"I'm going to scout around," he said, getting into his hired car, "and may run into New York before I stop here again, but I'll keep in touch. And please don't hope for too much all of a sudden," he smiled in parting. "There isn't likely to be any outward development for a day or two at least. We have to be patient in a case of this sort."

She laughed. "I confess that I expect a great deal—and soon. Good luck!"

Said Vic Morrison to himself as he rolled away: "And so do I—a great deal and good luck!"

As he disappeared, Scanlon and Rowland broke off another deep conference behind a tree and approached the lady of the house.

"Who's that bird?" asked Scanlon abruptly. "What's he want?"

"He is a detective?" she informed him, sweetly icy.

"He is, huh?" scowled Scanlon. "Who is he? Where's he from?"

"That," she froze him, "is immaterial. I will tell you, however, that he has found evidence that this was not, as you so graphically term it, an inside job. This being so——"

"What d'you mean he's got evidence?" demanded Scanlon.

Rowland preserved an intelligently profound silence.

"I mean precisely what I said," returned Mrs. Burdette Findlay with finality. "And as I was about to say further, if you gentlemen are going to continue loitering about these grounds as you have done all day instead of being out hunting for the thief, I can get along very well without your services."

"What d'you want us to do?" asked Scanlon, toning down once more for the good of his job.

She relayed Morrison's suggestion: "Some one undoubtedly saw the thief

in this vicinity. You can find the person or persons who saw him and get his description."

Scanlon glanced at his partner and suppressed a grin. Rowland coughed and stared vacuously with upraised brows.

"All right, lady," said Scanlon resignedly. "Anything you say goes with me. We'll make the canvass for you."

They strolled awhile in silence.

"Ain't it hell?" said Scanlon.

"Hell," said Rowland.

"Let's ring the office and see if they've got the dope on her insurance. This gag looks phonier than ever to me."

"That's an idea," said Rowland.

They rang the office and got the information that Mrs. Burdette Findlay had a blanket policy for fifty thousand dollars on jewels valued at seventy-five thousand.

"There y'are," said Scanlon. "And she tries to make us walk the ends of our legs off looking for suspicious persons! Why don't she come right out and ask us to swim the Sound if she thinks we're fish! Let's go sit down and look at the boats. Or maybe we can find a drink."

Being unacquainted in the countryside they had to walk three miles, but they found drinks.

"I'd laugh," said Scanlon sourly, "if we could bust her game."

"That's an idea," said Rowland.

CHAPTER VI.

At nine o'clock that evening Vic Morrison called Mrs. Burdette Findlay on the phone to report an item of progress. To his own great amusement he had gone a-sleuthing and to his equally great surprise had turned up something good enough to work into his play. The station agent had told him of Beans Daley inquiring about trains to New York.

But madame didn't give him time to tell his tidings. She was bubbling over with information.

"I have news," she exclaimed with notable excitement before he could say a dozen words. "I've received a letter—— Where are you, Mr. Morrison? Can you come at once and see it?"

Mr. Morrison, it chanced, was not far away. He could come at once. He had in fact timed his phone call with anticipation of such an invitation.

Ten minutes later he was studying the letter that had arrived by special delivery an hour ago. It was brief but said plenty:

> DEAR MADAM: On a fast sale we can get about fifteen thousand for the stuff we picked up in your place last night. If we take time we can get a bit more, but never mind that. If it is worth that much to you we would just as soon let you have it. If we see in the paper to-morrow morning that you raise the reward to fifteen thousand we will know you are willing to talk.

There was no signature.

She fluttered while Morrison scrutinized the paper, the typewriting, the envelope both inside and out, and the postmark.

"What do you think of it?" she queried anxiously. "Does it seem genuine? Do you think the thief really sent it?"

"In my opinion, given with reservations," said her chief of detectives, "it is genuine. It may have been written by a crank or a joker, but somehow I don't think so. A joker would have given it some signature and outlined some arrangement for turning over the money. Crank letters are usually more or less disjointed or threatening. This letter goes straight to the point by stating the terms under which negotiations may be opened. Looking at it without prejudice, also, the demand is not exorbitant—fifteen thousand for fifty-five thousand dollars' worth."

"Do you mean," she asked doubt-

fully, "that I should accept—pay him the fifteen thousand dollars?"

The thought seemed to amuse Morrison.

"No; I don't mean that. But I do think that you should fall in with this first step by giving the required answer in the morning papers. You don't have to commit yourself to pay the fifteen thousand dollars to any one who may happen to recover the jewelry while these negotiations are pending. Let the five thousand dollars reward stand unconditionally on the no-questions-asked basis, but tie a string to the fifteen thousand by specifying that it will be paid only after compliance with certain conditions which may be learned on application. You see?"

"Yes. But suppose——" She didn't finish the sentence but stared across the room, pondering.

"The next move," said Morrison after a minute of silence, "should show whether the letter is genuine. We could lead him on then and get him when he appears to close the deal."

"Break faith with him?"

"There's no obligation to keep faith with a crook."

"I'm not so sure of that," she demurred. "A pledge is a pledge and I'm sure I'd dream eternally of any man I caused to be sent to jail."

Vic Morrison greeted this further parade of her tender heart with mock despair.

"We're dealing with a crook, Mrs. Findlay," he insisted, "a man who robbed your house and is now trying to hold you up for fifteen thousand dollars. Won't you regard him exactly as what he is—a criminal who invaded your home, stole your property, and for all you know would have committed murder if he had met with interference? That's the type we have to deal with—a dangerous man."

He didn't care how black he painted this crook. He could see the workings of her mind and knew that what he said wasn't going to take.

She didn't comment on the picture he presented but cut back: "You remarked a moment ago that the price he asks is not exorbitant. Any price is exorbitant, is it not, if you are forced to pay it for what already belongs to you?"

"In an ordinary sense, yes, but this situation is not ordinary. When I made that remark I was looking at things from this viewpoint. He has the whip hand. He has possession of the jewelry and there's no assurance that he will be arrested. What I meant," he proceeded, building up the thought which he was sure he had planted in her mind, "is that he might have demanded twenty-five or thirty thousand dollars and under the circumstances still be offering a bargain. But he seems to be a fair trader, if we may call him that. He's asking just about what he could get for the stuff by disposing of it underground.

"As the letter says, he could make a little more if he took time, but that would necessitate pushing out the diamonds one by one through legitimate channels—by pawning them or selling to jewelers. That's too risky a business—too much danger of being spotted as he makes the rounds. And, by the way, the string of pearls is the poorest part of his loot. He can't get rid of that except through a fence and if he gets five thousand for it he'll be doing well. Crooked dealers don't pay any prices, you know, because the seller is under a bad handicap and at their mercy. So you see," he shrugged, "our friend the crook is fairly reasonable after all."

She nodded again, thoughtfully silent.

Vic Morrison gave her mind another jog. The pearls had a sentimental value, she had said, so——

"With an article like your necklace a thief not infrequently finds it safest to break it up and sell a few of the gems at a time. When that is done with pearls

it's next to impossible ever to get them together again."

"Oh, but he wouldn't do that!" she cried. "No, no! He mustn't—mustn't be allowed."

"We'll do our best to get him before that can happen," said Morrison soothingly but with a shading of tone that vaguely implied a doubt. "That's one big reason why it is advisable that you should appear willing to meet his demand. While there's a prospect of collecting from you he'll keep your jewelry intact. If you'll do that we can string him along——"

"I'm going to do it," she interrupted with decision, "and I'm going to go through with it. I'm going to pay the fifteen thousand dollars."

Vic Morrison protested! If she paid she would be encouraging crime. She would be throwing money away. The case was far from hopeless. It might take some time, but there she could be reasonably sure that the thief would be captured.

She stopped him to ask pointblank, "Have you really any tangible clue? Can you say that you are on the thief's trail—that you know you are?"

Frankness being the groundwork upon which this representative of the Universal Investigation Bureau had established himself, he adhered to it manfully!

"I'm sorry," he said and looked it, "but I can't tell you that. We are following a lead, but until we locate our man we won't know whether we're on the right track. We think we are, but"—he gestured—"he may be able to prove he was a hundred miles away when the robbery took place. If he can do that we'll have to come back and start all over again."

"That settles the matter then," she said. "I'm not questioning your ability, please understand, but I prefer not to run the risk of failure. I don't care about the thief. I don't want him. I want the jewels—the pearls especially. Even though I have to pay fifteen thousand dollars for them I'll lose nothing. Assuming that they would not be recovered in the ordinary course of events."

"Your insurance——" began Morrison, keeping up the pretense of opposition.

"My insurance only covers two thirds of the value," she said. "Two thirds of fifty-five thousand dollars is less than forty thousand. Either way I would fare just about the same financially. But, as I've explained, it is not purely a question of intrinsic value. The pearls mean much more to me than the money they cost."

Morrison bowed as to the inevitable.

"It is for you to say, of course, and I won't try further to dissuade you. If you have no objection, however, I'd like to witness the negotiations. You'll have to move carefully even after you're satisfied that this letter writer is in a position to deliver. Even though he has the goods this may be only a trick to take you—to rob you of fifteen thousand dollars more."

Preoccupied with the prospect of getting back the necklace she gave only a perfunctory "How?" to his warning.

"I don't know," he replied. "I can't figure—except that there's some scheme to hand over a fake package in return for the cash. That's all I can see at the moment and because it may be attempted I believe you should have some protection while carrying out the deal. If you'll let me look on——"

"But the thief wouldn't deal with an officer."

"I wouldn't appear as an officer—merely as your agent. I doubt whether he will insist upon dealing directly with you alone. When it comes time to get together finally it's likely that some out-of-the-way spot will be named—somewhere you couldn't be expected to go unaccompanied. From his tone somehow I imagine that he'll concede you

the right to some reasonable safeguard. Don't you think so?"

She nodded rather absently.

"And so," he went on, "I could see the case through and be ready to prevent trickery. So long as things went smoothly I'd stay quiet and not interfere in any way, you understand. I would do nothing that might interfere with the peaceful recovery of your property on any terms you had agreed to. That's strictly your business, although"—he laughed—"I hate to think of the crook himself collecting that five thousand reward and more."

Her glance sharpened on him a trifle as she recalled that he was a volunteer attracted to the case wholly by the reward. His interest being so thoroughly selfish, might he not be influenced to perceive trickery where it did not exist? Not deliberately, perhaps, but through the eye of self-interest? He had said that it would not be dishonorable to break faith with a crook in a situation of this kind. She placed that statement in opposition to his promise not to do anything that might jeopardize the negotiations. His avowed belief that a crook could not be trusted to play fair; that there was always the possibility that he would act on that belief.

"It's kind of you," she said, "to offer your services but suppose we leave the details to be gone into later—when we have some tangible proposition before us. On second thought I've decided not to be too optimistic about this letter. It may after all have been written by a crank or a joker. We'll wait for the answer to my acceptance before planning ahead too far."

She was turning the conversation without committing herself on his request that he be allowed to carry on as an observer. He let the evasion pass with a nod while asking whether she had informed the police about the letter.

"I haven't," she answered, "and won't for the time being. You are the only one who knows of it and I'm sure you'll think it best to say nothing."

"Of course," he nodded, "but the police and these other operatives will be around asking questions when they read that the reward has been increased. They'll want to know under what conditions the fifteen thousand dollars will be paid. What will you tell them?"

"Nothing. I'll say simply that the conditions will be given out in good time—as they will. And—oh," she urged the conversation into another channel, "when you phoned you started to say that you had discovered something. What was it, please? This letter seemed so important to me then that I couldn't listen."

Vic Morrison fingered the solid gold-plated shield in his vest pocket so that a corner of it peeped casually out.

"I discovered something," he admitted seriously, "something that indicates we're hunting for the right man. The agent at Hazelbrook station saw a suspicious character there yesterday and the description fits the man we're looking for. This stranger showed up at the station about two o'clock in the afternoon and asked about trains for New York. The agent told him there wouldn't be a train for three hours and gave him a time table. He stayed around the station for about half an hour—and that was the last the agent saw of him."

He paused with a quiet air of accomplishment, efficiency, which conveyed that he had not yet said it all.

She motioned eagerly for him to go on—"Yes?"

"The last the station agent saw of him," Morrison emphasized, "he was heading in this direction. And he didn't show up for the next train. He didn't take a train out of Hazlebrook at all—the agent is sure of that. Nor, remember, did he arrive by train."

As he paused again significantly she confessed some slight puzzlement.

"I don't quite understand. If he neither arrived nor left by train—what is the point you're making?"

"That he wasn't alone," said Morrison. "He came and went in a car. The agent thinks he heard a car stop for a second just before this fellow entered the station and he undoubtedly did. The car didn't stand there waiting for him, of course; it kept moving so nobody would notice it particularly and picked him up later. With more than one man to look for—and a car—we've got a far bigger chance of making a quick clean up."

"But"—she still was puzzled—"why did this man go to the railroad station and make himself so conspicuous?"

The representative of the Universal Investigation Bureau spread his hands.

"That," he allowed, "is a hard question. There may have been sense to the move and there may not. Crooks do queer things sometimes—make motions they think are wise and deep but are really only foolish. The best I can figure is that they had some idea of making a get-away by train in case their car got spotted. Whether that guess is right or wrong doesn't matter, though. What does matter is that we have something positive to work on at this end. Now we're sure there was more than one and that they had a car," he reeled off the hokum evenly, "all we have to do is locate somebody who noticed the car and can describe it and whoever was in it besides the man who stopped off at the station. A description of him ought to stir up some one's memory."

Vic Morrison might or might not have made a great detective. Mrs. Burdette Findlay thought he was. She glowed with sincere appreciation of his bunk and expressed herself lavishly.

"You've done splendidly," she concluded, "marvelously, and I'm sure that if the case were left in your hands you would bring me back my jewels. But, please," she almost begged, "you do understand my feelings, don't you? Every minute adds to my suspense, my fear that my pearls will not be recovered. You yourself have impressed upon me the danger of the string being broken up and the pearls scattered. I couldn't bear that—I couldn't!"

"I understand," he said gently. "You mean that you'd rather not have us press the hunt too much until you've tested the genuineness of that letter?"

She was profusely grateful; and materially so, too.

"I'm not forgetting, Mr. Morrison, that you are giving up an opportunity to earn five thousand dollars—an opportunity toward which you have made excellent progress. As you explained when taking up the case it is a plain matter of business with you. Therefore, since I am persuading you to sacrifice the legitimate profits of your business it rests with me to cover your loss. No, no, no!" she hushed his protest. "I mean that and I can afford to please my fancy. The pearls are worth so much more to me than money. When they and the other jewels are again in my hands I will pay you the five thousand dollars for having refrained from taking any steps that might have alarmed the thief during my negotiations with him. That, I think, seems only fair."

Vic Morrison declared gallantly that he couldn't possibly accept such a generous gift—but compromised by agreeing to take pay for the time he had put in! What a damn' simp she was!

"Very well," she smiled, with the clear intention of paying him according to her exaggerated valuation of his efforts, "we'll say no more about that just now. But wait! What about these other men—detectives!" she laughed, "who knew no more than to accuse my servants. Will they find out what you've just told me?"

"Why, yes, they will unless they're

absolutely brainless. Now that I've set the station agent's mind on the incident he'll tell everybody he meets that he saw the thief. Scanlon and Rowland can't escape hearing that."

"Then I'll discharge them first thing in the morning," she asserted. "I won't have them blundering around when they may spoil everything."

But Morrison pleaded for them again.

"Let them stay at work," he said. "On their showing so far I guess they won't do any harm. If you pull them off they'll know there's something doing and will butt in all the more—probably train you and me with the idea of jumping in at the last moment and claiming the reward. I'd let them go ahead—blundering."

Scanlon and Rowland got another reprieve.

"It's getting late," suggested Morrison, "and the thief expects his answer in the morning papers. Are you still decided to meet his terms?"

She was; and so they collaborated on a guardedly worded advertisement which they phoned to the New York papers for prominent display on the second or third pages.

Then Vic Morrison took his leave, with further thanks making his ears red—almost! He grinned happily as he drove away. Dumb, but a good old hen, she was. Wanted him to shoot in his bill so she could raise it to five thousand bucks. But he wouldn't give her any bill. No. His bill already was in—and was being rushed to settlement! Not for five, but for fifteen thousand dollars!

CHAPTER VII.

Beans Daley fell naturally into the mistake that his breed is so prone to make. He couldn't keep a good thing to himself if it was likely to bring glory to him. He couldn't resist the urge that had inspired his drug-inflamed brain to undertake the robbery. That urge to show the bums that he was deserving of more respect than "Hey, Beans!" and "Hey, Dope!" Now that he had turned a trick he had to show off. Having something worth flashing, he had to flash it.

When he sneaked from his room after dark he was coked up nigh to the limit. The hours had been long since the drunk stumbling outside his door startled him. Long and dreadful, notwithstanding the dope from which he sought courage. He was afraid to offer his loot for sale so soon. More afraid because he had no safe place in which to hide it. There was none to whom he could intrust it for safekeeping—nobody who wouldn't give him the razz when he asked its return. He carried it with him—and the gun he had borrowed—fearing every shadow, yet trembling also with a pathetic eagerness to show the bums his stuff.

Not all of it—oh, no. He was cagey, he was. They'd climb on him and kick his head off—bump him off, some of them—for a thin half of his bagful. If they knew he had it. But they wouldn't know—not from him, they wouldn't. He didn't have to show the whole bundle to make their eyes bulge out. Any piece of it would do. Maybe not the necklace—that was maybe phoney. But any one of the hunks of ice. They were the candy. Sure. Lookut how they cut into the window in his room! Just a flash—that's all he'd give the bums for now. Just a dazzle to make their eyes stick out and show them he was a regular fella.

For a couple of hours he slouched around, furtively, avoiding those he was anxious to meet; cursing because he daren't mingle with them while carrying all his plunder. Returning to his room he prospected the rough flooring until he found a loose board, but in prying this up he broke off a long splinter. That wouldn't do; the splinter marked the place too clearly. He cursed and

snarled impotently, goaded by that overwhelming desire to make his flash. Till finally he crept into a dungeonlike room in the rear of the basement—a room unrentable even in that squalid region where few considered light and ventilation as necessary to life—a room littered with rubbish, broken boxes, filthy molding rags and newspapers. In a far corner he dug in all but one item of his loot.

Clutching in his pocket a four-carat diamond ring, he went down the line with as much of a swagger as his hollow-chested body could assume. He wasn't saying a thing. He didn't have to. Cripes! Didn't the rock talk loud enough when he slyly displayed it!

Unfortunately for himself the habit of cringing from and fawning upon those who ranked as better men was deeply grained in Beans Daley. He craved notice from them, the guns, gamblers, dope distributors and peddlers, bootleggers, thieves, strong-arm men—from any guy with a rep. In his heart he hated them because ordinarily they walked over him, but he never failed to slink close to them as he could get without being kicked aside. His going for a ride with Tony Granelli bore evidence. He hated them but hungered for a word of recognition—even the contemptuous "Hey, Dope!" from the bums he now was going to show something.

And so he was flattered when presently Kelly Martin motioned him into a doorway with a smile and "Hey, Beans, let's see the hoop. I hear it makes Broadway look like a cellar. Roll it, kid, and let's look."

Beans Daley grinned, immensely flattered. Never before had Kelly Martin spoken to him. And here was Kelly Martin friendly as pie and asking a favor! Cripes! Kelly Martin who was one of the top guys of a gang of wagon boosters and caravan stick-ups!

"Sure, Kelly," said Daley, daringly familiar. He rolled the hoop—but on his own finger.

"Some headlight!" Kelly Martin bent to look closer. It looked even better than one of his runners had reported. "You got something, kid," he pronounced, "the way it looks in this bum light, anyhow. Slip it till I get a better eye on it."

Beans Daley hesitated. He was fearful of crossing Kelly Martin but—he didn't want the ring to get out of his own hands.

"Let's look," said Martin again. "I might want to buy it of you if it hits me right. Slip it, kid. You want to sell, don't you?"

Tongue-tied by thought of possible consequences should he refuse to meet Kelly Martin's request, Daley nodded. He hadn't contemplated any such quick sale, but next to his desire to flash his stuff was the desire to get rid of it for cash. He could use a roll and he'd just as soon see Martin have the ring as anybody. It was worth, he figured, maybe five or six thousand dollars; which was about half its value. If he gave Martin a good buy on it—say a hundred and a half—he'd make a good friend who could help him get right prices for the rest of the stuff. A hundred and a half wasn't too much—like a dollar and a half to a guy that pulled down big money like Kelly Martin did all the time.

Beans Daley slipped the hoop.

Kelly Martin promptly pocketed it.

"You're damn' lucky a cop didn't see you first," he grinned. "Here—go buy yourself another shot of hop."

Taking a twenty-dollar bill from a fat roll he stuck it into Daley's hand and turned away!

Daley cried out, a whimpering cry of anger, before he realized that he could only yell himself into a mess of trouble. All the same, he wasn't going to let the bum rob him and walk out on him like that. No, by cripes! He'd show 'em!

His hand jerked to the gun on his hip. There was Martin's broad back only a couple of steps away. He'd get the——

If Kelly Martin hadn't looked back Beans Daley would have pulled the gun and fired—probably. He was full enough of dope to do the act. But Martin did turn and, comprehending that the other's motion meant but one thing, he jumped. His heavy hand cuffed Daley on the ear so hard that the thought of shooting was jarred completely out of the dope fiend's head.

"Gimme the gun," said Kelly Martin, "and gimme it quick or I'll slap your ears around your head and bat it so flat it'll go under a postage stamp! Gimme!"

Daley crouched back, whining, "I didn't mean nothing——"

"Gimme!" repeated Martin, cuffing him again. He got the gun. "Now listen, Dope," he said, "I don't want you running around making any cracks, see? And I don't want to have to be slapping the head off you all the time. So when you see me coming any time you get to hell off the street."

"I didn't mean nothing——"

"Shut up! Where'd you lift the stone?"

In imagination Daley felt the ears being slapped around his head until he gave up all his loot. Fuddled and frightened though he was, he rallied his wit to save it.

"I—I lifted a purse."

From a sneak thief it was plausible

"That all was in it?"

"Just that," gulped Daley, "and—a coupla dollars."

"Then figure you're twenty bucks ahead because I ought to take it off you for the pass you made with the gun," said Martin, going on his way.

Half an hour later he gave the ring to his girl.

"Here's a nifty, Babe," he grinned, "hang it on yourself."

"O-o-oh!" said she, "ain't it grand!"

Thus lightly did the curve move on to extend itself into a circle.

CHAPTER VIII.

While Kelly Martin was so casually decorating his girl with Mrs. Burdette Findlay's solitaire, Vic Morrison was rejoining Jake Kramer in their little New York flat with the trite but expressive statement, "She falls like she'd stepped off a cliff!" He had just returned from feeding to the lady the bunk which, while preying on her fears, had convinced her that her jewels could be ransomed for fifteen thousand dollars.

Morrison's recital was buoyantly flippant, but Kramer wasn't responsive. Although the harvest they had sown seemed as good as garnered, Jake's instinctive dislike for New York City still ruled him. He brooded, wishful for his native heath, Chicago. To hell with New York!

"Too soft," he criticized pessimistically as Morrison finished the story of his triumph. "She fell too hard, I'd say. You sure you've got her right, Vic? Sure she isn't making a monkey out of you?"

Morrison regarded him with disgust tinged with reproach.

"Give me credit, Jake! I've been off the farm over a week, haven't I? I know when they fall. Why, say," he chuckled, "she believes little Vic and his gold shield invented detecting, and that Scotland Yard and Burns and Flynn and all the rest of them come to us to show them how. That's how good we're sitting."

"And she calls you chief," said Kramer with friendly malice. "Or is she so stuck on you she calls you by your handle?"

"Go to hell!" said Morrison pleasantly. "Let's have a drink on the fifteen thousand. What d'you think of her

going to pay me the reward for not catching her robber? Can't even that dig a grin out of you?"

"It might," said Kramer, "if there was a chance of getting it. How d'you know these dicks aren't right in calling it an inside job?"

"I think so myself."

"Then what if they blow it off while we're grabbing?"

Morrison leaned back with an air of patience.

"You didn't listen to me, Jake. Didn't I tell you they're hams? Didn't I tell you she told them to get busy and shooed them off the lot after I sleuthed the robber up and down the back stairs? Didn't I tell you I pumped a lot of blah into the station agent and made him think there was a hole carful of crooks? Well?"

"Well," said Kramer, purposely thick, "what if you did?"

"Well," Morrison took time out for his drink, "I'll give you the diagram. The hams are going to hook onto the blah I primed the station agent with. They've got to hook onto something or be fired. And it's got to be something that keeps them well away from the lot or they're fired again. The inside-job gadget doesn't win any bets from the missus, you understand. She's put it up to the hams that way and they're not so dumb they can't take a hint when it's a question of wages and expenses."

"Why didn't you let her fire them? We could be sure then that they won't bust in."

"Haven't I been telling you we can be sure of that now? They won't bust in because they'll be somewhere else in the United States running up expenses while hunting for the station agent's crooks. I didn't want them fired because when everything's over I don't want anybody saying I got the hen to call the hams off the case and leave herself open on this ransom gag. It isn't my fault if she doesn't tell them and the police about the letter. Nobody can look cross-eyed at me for that and claim I muzzled her."

"Uh." Kramer wrinkled his nose thoughtfully. He knew how good his partner was and gave him due credit, but—— "You think we can get away with this without a dirty face?"

"Why not? We've got away with it before, haven't we?"

"Not always. Never with anything like fifteen thousand."

"Then now's the time to boost our average. We came East looking for big money, didn't we? All right. Here's where we get it. Quit crabbing, Jake, and mark up the good time we'll have on the roll—in Chicago."

Jake quit crabbing but offered an amendment to the program: "Don't let's try the luck too far, Vic. We'll get the jack and blow quick—both of us. You'll only get yourself into a jam if you wave that call-me-chief tin shield too much. It'll look like hell if you wear the gold off it with overwork. We blow together on the gun—what d'you say?"

"We'll see how the breaks go," said Morrison tentatively. "Look here and I'll give you the layout."

He drew a rough plan of the ground floor of Mrs. Burdette Findlay's bungalow and its surroundings, including the road to the shore down which Beans Daley had strayed to marvel covetously over the homes that were nearly as big as police headquarters.

"That's the road you take, Jake, and then you go a half mile north along the shore. It's the fourth house. There's a little room on the south side—here—with a door to the veranda. That's where the phone is—and that's where we'll be. I'll see that the door is open. Right?"

Kramer nodded. "What time?"

"We'll make it midnight so everybody will be abed but the hen. Some sweetie gave her the beads and she'd sit up all summer to get them back."

"Suppose I bump into somebody——"

"Who?"

"The hams, maybe. If they're barred from snooping there daytimes they might prowl around nights."

"Don't you believe it. The hen is paying the freight and they've got their orders. I wouldn't be surprised if they think it's a fake job she rigged herself —an insurance grab. What do they care if it is? It's nothing off their noses."

Kramer hadn't thought of the robbery as a fake. Now he did.

"It might be phony——"

"It isn't," said Morrison emphatically. "I'm telling you, Jake, and I know. I talked with her long enough to size her up. She's on the level and she's crawling with money."

"The hick cops——"

"They're chasing the station agent's carload of crooks. The chief and a county detective were all het up over the stranger the agent saw. Then I fed in the bunk that he must have had pals in a car and they got het up some more —so they steamed. Forget it, Jake. The only bird you may run into is the chauffeur whose conscience or something may be worrying him. He lives in the garage, here"—he made a mark on the plan—"but you don't have to go near it. If you do run into him and don't get a chance to crown him, push back his eyes with your Universal shield and fetch him to the house. You're one of my men and can prove it, see? Once he's inside we'll take care of him."

He got up and stretched.

"Splash some more of the fine old mellow Brooklyn Scotch, Jake, then we'll fix up another love letter for the old girl and I'm going to bed. This time to-morrow night, Jake—— Here's to you! Money in the bank!"

"Let's hope," said Jake and to himself remarked again that the lay was too soft. Probably he'd have felt better had he been stimulated like Morrison with the thrill of active achievement and pride of creation. Jake wasn't lacking in confidence. He merely had the glooms which often come to the man who has to wait, twiddling his thumbs until his cue is called.

CHAPTER IX.

Scanlon and Rowland were early callers on Mrs. Burdette Findlay. So early that they had to wait an hour while she got up and dressed. She greeted them coldly, but that didn't altogether douse Scanlon's belligerency. He was sore and didn't care if she did know it. Rowland also was sore but kept his feelings fairly well wrapped in his favorite profound silence.

Scanlon started right in: "What's this stuff in 'smorning's papers about a fifteen-thousand-dollar reward? Who's putting out that stuff? What's it all about, anyhow?"

Madame proceeded to shut him right off: "Disregarding your insolence for the moment, sir, I'll answer you. To use your own term and so avoid any danger of seeming obscure to you, I put out the stuff. Is that all you wish to know?"

"That don't begin to be the half of it," he retorted nastily, "but it's all you're going to tell us, ain't it? That's all we get," he blared, blown up by her look of icy disdain, "but that ain't all you're telling this other bird you've got buzzing around and butting in on our case. Who is he anyhow? Where's he come from anyhow? What's the fancy game anyhow? What's his drag, anyhow, that you go and raise the ante and throw it to him? I'm asking you!"

She eyed him angrily but it was a cold contained anger which increased his own heedless rage.

"I'm asking you!" he repeated violently. "What's the fancy game anyhow? What the idea in holding out on

us anyhow? Why don't you come clean with us instead of trying to make suckers out of me and my partner? We're the guys you hired, ain't we? Ain't we willing to work if we're let? But are we let? I'll say not! You tell us to beat it and run up and down the road hollering has anybody seen a second-story worker biting his name and address anywheres, when there ain't any second-story worker in this deck nowheres! You give us the run-around when we ought to be working right here! Then this fancy bird with the car lines himself up and the deep stuff starts, with the reward getting hoisted way up and nobody but him on the inside track! What d'you think we think of that anyhow? I'm asking you!"

For want of breath he halted, glaring, apoplectic.

Rowland shuffled his feet, coughed, opened his mouth and then shut it to preserve his weighty silence which at this juncture was for once intelligent. If he kept out of the argument he might manage to save his job. There was no need of committing professional suicide with Scanlon.

Mrs. Burdette Findlay spoke as Scanlon was about to turn loose another blast.

"If that is all you have to say," she said, "I'll bid you good morning, sir."

"Sure you will," jeered Scanlon, driving recklessly on, "and because why? I'll tell you! Because you don't want anybody around that can see into the insides of this robbery racket! You don't want anybody that can pin it right where it belongs, see? So because we get it right, me and Rowland, you put handcuffs on us and turn us around and tell us to run and wear out our shoes! You don't want us sticking too close to home because if we do somebody close to home is liable to get burnt! That's telling it, ain't it?"

She didn't catch the intended implication that she had connived in the robbery but supposed that he was harping on his cry of "inside job." Consequently she received his outburst with a smile of scornful amusement when, had she fully realized his meaning, she would have withered him with a blaze of indignation and tolerated not another word. As it was, her anger subsiding, she found pity for him. He was such a poor blundering creature! An unfortunate, afflicted with an ungovernable temper and blinded by a stubborn one-track mind! Out of sheer charity she decided to overlook his spasm and so, tactfully as possible, she diverted the conversation to give him opportunity to tone down.

"Has no trace been found of the car?" She glanced from one to the other and spoke as though there had been no unpleasantness. "The car, that is, that let one of the thieves out at the railroad station. Hasn't any one been found who noticed its number or the direction it took from here?"

Rowland's profundity was badly jolted. He gaped a vacant "Uh?" while his head bent forward between sagging shoulders as he grasped what she had said. He was flabbergasted, flabby with the realization of what it meant for himself and Scanlon. A car letting out one of the thieves! They hadn't heard anything of that.

Scanlon also was taken off his feet. His jaw hung, too, as it appeared that he had stupidly crucified himself.

Charity welled deeper in madame's breast. What poor hopeless incompetents they were to be still so far away from the main finger post in the case! She sighed. Truly, as the talented Mr. Morrison had said, it could do no harm to show them the way.

"Don't you think that is the most promising clew?" she said, again tactful. "There must be some one who saw——"

"Let me get this straight," interrupted Scanlon thickly, his shock passing. "What car are you talking about?"

His manner showed no improvement, but she pursued her effort toward an amicable understanding.

"Why, the car in which the thieves came and went." She believed she was stating a fact; that there was indeed more than one thief. She almost believed that the station agent actually had seen Beans Daley descend from the machine!

"How many were in it?" barked Scanlon.

"Why—I don't know."

"Who does know?"

Anger flickered in her eye as she answered stiffly, "That, I believe, has yet to be determined."

"But somebody got out of the car, you said. Then somebody must have seen it. Couldn't they count?"

She said nothing. She wanted to be kind but the man was unbearable.

"Who says he saw the car?" plugged Scanlon. "Who saw anybody get out of it?"

She moved to end the interview.

"If you will ask the agent at Hazelbrook station I'm sure he'll give you all the information available. I'm sorry I must go now. I have an appointment——"

"A minute more don't matter, does it?" said Scanlon, impudently detaining her with outstretched hand.

The sudden flush at her temples caused Rowland to intervene at last. There was nothing heavy about him, however, except his pose; and he was used to being led by Scanlon. He protested but that was all; it was without vigor.

"Say, listen," he began, tugging at the other's sleeve.

"You keep out!" snapped Scanlon, shaking him off.

Rowland floundered but Mrs. Burdette Findlay saved him from further embarrassment.

"Thank you," she said, with a friendly note that was much to his relief, "but I really require no assistance in disposing of this—this ignoramus."

"That's all right, too," said Scanlon, "I've been called worse than that and let it go by. Will you tell me when this car you're talking about is supposed to have come along packed full of crooks? It won't hurt you to tell that, will it? When?"

She shrugged and told him, "Yesterday afternoon."

"What time?"

"About two o'clock, I'm told."

"Who tells you?"

Unable to control her temper any longer, she flared.

"I'm not under cross examination, sir. Will you kindly leave my house?"

"Sure," nodded Scanlon, certain that he now had things doped right, "and you don't have to tell me where you get the bunk about a gang of crooks in a car that nobody saw. I bet it was the fancy bird who's horned himself in solid on the ground floor. What's his job anyhow? Director of this here propaganda stuff, huh?

"First he has you tip us off," he grinned mockingly, "on how a crook just walked into your house through the door and upstairs and took what looked good and then walked out again. A hot tip! Now he has you pass us another about a whole wagon load of crooks who picnicked around all afternoon until they got good and ready—— Aw"—he made a wide sweeping gesture as though he were clearing junk from his path—"what kind of mutts d'you think we are anyhow? Go find somebody that likes to be kidded. Your stuff don't get over with me."

His closing words were directed at her back as she left the room.

"See," he said to Rowland. "That's the way they all do when you're telling them something they don't like. They walk out on you. Let's get to hell."

Outside the house he expressed himself still more feelingly in varied hues.

"Now we're up against it," said Rowland glumly when at length he found room for speech. "You've queered the office on a good case and got us both fired. I'm with you Mike," he declared hastily as Scanlon was about to open up on him, "you know that—with you all the time—but—well, I dunno. There might be something to this stuff about a car and a feller at the station. What d'you say we look it up?"

"Something nothing!" said Scanlon, "but just for the hell of it we'll go hear what this agent bird has to say."

When they parted from the railroad man he was far from being their friend, but having peeled away the additions which Vic Morrison by suggestions had made to his story they had reduced it to the bare fact that a stranger had inquired the time of the next train to New York and then gone away when advised that he had three hours to wait.

"That's that," Scanlon reviewed. "No gang and no car. Just a guy asking when's the next train. Suspicious? Sure! Anybody he don't know looks suspicious to a hick. Me, I don't blame the guy for hiking on. He'd been a goat if he waited three hours in this dump. Look at us! Two hours before we get a train. Come on and walk!"

They walked a spell in silence.

"You going back to town?" asked Rowland.

"After a while. There's nothing to rush us. All we've got to do when we get there is draw our time. That dame must've burned up the phone," he grinned sourly, "when she yelled for us to go under the ax."

Rowland couldn't see any humorous side to their position.

"I'd laugh," said Scanlon, repeating his remark of yesterday which hinged on the proposition that the robbery was a fake covering an insurance swindle, "if we could bust her game. Maybe we can. Let's see who this fancy bird that's running things is anyhow."

"That's an idea," said Rowland automatically but faintly.

CHAPTER X.

Mrs. Burdette Findlay had two other early callers who were curious about the advertised conditional offer of fifteen thousand dollars. These were the village police chief and the county detective. They accepted without question her statement that she hoped through it to draw information which the unconditional offer of five thousand would not bring.

"As for the conditions," she smiled, "they won't be too difficult. If you think you can qualify now, chief, I'll make them very, very easy."

The pleasantry was in good season, he having said that there was nothing new.

"No, no, not right this minute I can't, ma'am," he chuckled, "though I'm not saying I couldn't use fifteen thousand or so. These city detectives of yours are more likely to get it, I guess. I see them down the road as I came along, Sort of close, ain't they?" he hinted mildly. "They seem to want to work all by themselves."

It was on the tip of her tongue to say that they were no longer her detectives but didn't because that would involve explanation. She passed off his remark.

"I'm taking the station agent down to New York this morning," he imparted, "to see can he find anybody in the rogues' gallery like the stranger he saw yesterday. Chances are he can, the city officers say, when I tell them what a slick job it was. That's what we're counting on, ma'am. If the agent can pick out the man, the city officers say they'll get him mighty quick. We're doing the best we can, you see, ma'am."

"I know you are," she assured him warmly but with inward misgiving. "You're doing all that can be done."

"I was wondering," he fished again delicately, "whether your detectives are aiming to take him down to look at the pictures. We might's well all go together if they are."

"Really, chief," she said truthfully, "I don't know their plans. If you can steal a march on them in this way I'd advise you to do it without bothering about what they are doing. I'd be delighted to have you win the reward or share in it at least."

The chief wagged his head. His only contact with Scanlon and Rowland had been extremely disappointing because they hadn't cleared up the case immediately with a brilliant flourish, but now he guessed they'd only been fooling him with their talk that the chauffeur and a maid were guilty. He guessed also that he wasn't stealing any march on them by taking the station agent to inspect the rogues' gallery. If that was likely to produce anything they'd have done it ere this. The chief wasn't downhearted; he simply admitted his inferiority in a bigger game than he usually sat in.

After his departure Mrs. Burdette Findlay took time to ponder the misgiving he had aroused. Why hadn't Mr. Morrison taken the station agent to make a search of the rogues' gallery for the suspect? Mr. Morrison's grasp of the case had been so rapid and masterful that it was strange to find him neglecting such an obviously important and helpful detail.

She wondered—not that it greatly mattered—but she wondered if she had not permitted herself to be carried away by Mr. Morrison's confident attitude. Narrowed down, what greater progress had he made than the chief? None that she knew of aside from his own assertion that his organization was on the trail of a known criminal who very probably had committed the robbery. Only probably. Why then hadn't he used the station agent to make sure that they weren't wasting time running down an innocent man? The rogues' gallery contained photographs of all known criminals. All they had to do was point out the photograph of the man they were hunting and ask the station agent if they were right. Why hadn't Mr. Morrison seen to that at once? It was strange.

Mr. Morrison of the Universal Investigation Bureau—— What did she know of Mr. Morrison or of the organization he represented? Nothing more than he had told her. Which was —nothing! Yet she had been so impressed that she had confided to Mr. Morrison exclusively the demand for ransom and had solicited his advice. He had of course opposed concurrence with the demand, nevertheless she felt vaguely that she had somehow been guided by what he said. He had guided her, it seemed, by indirection, subtlely encouraging her by some psychological process to take a course contrary to what he was urging. But that was ridiculous.

She laughed at herself for such silly imaginings, but they didn't, wouldn't, vanish. And to top them was the unalterable fact that she had under the impulse of some queer enthusiasm contracted to pay him the five thousand dollars reward if the ransom negotiations should prove successful. Why had she done that? Why should he and not, for instance, the village police chief get the five thousand? For no other reason than that he declared he virtually had his hand on the robber's shoulder.

What evidence had she that this was so? Not an atom! If the chief had made a similar unsupported statement would she have thrust the five thousand dollars upon him? She smiled, shaking her head. Then why thrust it upon Mr. Morrison? It was curious—very.

The arrival of the second communication by special delivery took her out of her perplexing and rather discon-

certing reverie. Tearing it open with anxious haste she read:

DEAR MADAM: Have the fifteen thousand dollars, in used ten-and-twenty-dollar bills, ready for payment at any hour we may call for it. You will receive a telephone message instructing you to drive alone along a certain road. You will start immediately, alone, and drive at a moderate speed until intercepted.

As evidence of our ability to carry out the bargain we offer you only the rough plan of your house, showing the route followed to your room. Entrance, you will note, was made through the screen door beside the rear stairway on the north side. Failure to comply immediately with the final instructions to be given by telephone will be regarded as final notice that you have abandoned the negotiations. There will be no second chance. The telephone message may reach you at any hour between noon and midnight on any day during the next week.

Finishing the second reading she laughed a high, nervous note. This was too grotesque! She must sit beside her telephone, clutching fifteen thousand dollars in cash, from noon to midnight each day for perhaps a week! She must wait like that until some person unknown to her ordered her by telephone to drive an unstated distance! Somewhere on the road some one would stop her and take the fifteen thousand dollars in exchange, presumably, for her stolen jewelry! Presumably! No more than that.

She laughed again, the same high note. It was an insane proposition. She would have to be insane to take it up. Why wasn't she offered some assurance—a promise that her jewels would be returned? But no, they weren't even mentioned! She was to surrender fifteen thousand dollars for nothing, so far as this letter stated! Lunacy!

She checked another laugh as it was degenerating into a giggle. Grotesque, insane though it seemed there was still an inescapable stark reality to it all. Failure to mention the jewels was not the only odd feature of the letter. It contained no warning against treachery on her part. Neither did it warn her against informing the police. The writer evidently took for granted that she would realize how best to serve her own interests. That was understood. Wasn't it to be understood also that the jewels would be given up?

The chimes of a clock echoed softly through the house. Noon! The first noon—and the money was not at hand! What if the call should come now, this instant. Her eyes, wide, dreading, searched through the letter for the frightsome threat—the only threat—"Failure to comply immediately will be regarded as final notice that you have abandoned the negotiations. There will be no second chance!"

No second chance! Because she had not been given adequate time for preparation she might lose her beloved pearls forever! That wasn't fair! She must have time—time to get the money! Time to go to her bank in New York. Two hours—no, three hours; it couldn't be done in less than three hours! And any moment now the telephone might ring with the summons for her to go—somewhere—with fifteen thousand dollars!

Mrs. Burdette Findlay regained the mantle of composure but beneath it she was wildly stampeded.

Five minutes later she was in her limousine rushing toward the city.

Her maid, commanded not to move an inch from the telephone, was staring dazedly at the door through which her mistress had whirled as she never had whirled before. Nor was that the only thing that dazed the girl. There was that breathless injunction:

"Don't move from the phone until I return! Don't let any one use it! Don't let any one touch it! If any one calls for me ask—ask is it a message for me to go motoring! If it is say—say that I just received the letter—that I have gone to New York for—for a package. I'll be ready to start the instant I return!"

The maid thought madame had gone crazy. In a manner she had.

CHAPTER XI.

This being another day Beans Daley felt better even though he was up and on the street at the early hour of noon. The bright sunshine beating straight down troubled his eyes some but otherwise he was all right and, so far as might be, was at peace with the world. The drug-made exaltation of the first hour after the quaking agony of awakening was always great.

The affair of the night before with Kelly Martin was already of the dim past. It was just a memory in the dark recesses of his brain, jumbled in with other scores which he in his highest drug-winged flights often promised to settle; but never did. In one way he chose to regard the incident he had made a bum out of Martin! Lookut how he'd got away with the claim that the ring was all he had! He'd put that over on Kelly Martin, hadn't he?

Daley felt good—and safe. Nobody was ever going to think of him in connection with that robbery out in the wilderness. Cripes! That was funny. Tony Granelli taking him for a ride and dumping him out half scared to death, Heaven knows where. Wait till Granelli got back. The big bum thought he had a laugh, but wait till he got a flash at something that'd knock his eye out. Whose laugh would it be then?

The bravado complex was working again in spite of the disastrous results attending his exhibition of the ring. From the loot hidden among the rubbish which nobody ever disturbed in that noisome tenement cellar he had brought along an eight-thousand-dollar diamond bar pin. Maybe he couldn't knock somebody's eye out with that! But he'd watch his step this time. There wasn't nobody going to bat his ears off and take it away from him. And one of these days he'd break out the string of beads—only he wasn't sure about them.

The papers said they were worth thirty-five thousand dollars but who'n hell ever believed the papers? Lookut the hop they were always spilling. Like when they said the Black Hand cut the heart out of the Dumb Wop and shipped it back to Sicily for something or other. The papers were a bunch of liars. Everybody knew Hump Gurry was the guy who cut out the Dumb Wop's heart and fed it to a cat because the Wop trimmed him out of three hundred with trained dice loaded with mercury.

Dreaming of the flash he would make with the pearls if they were real, Daley sidled into a doorway to brighten the picture with another shot. He could take a couple of them couldn't he, and try them out. That was the line. And if they were regular—cripes! Thirty-five grand! Some flash!

"Sniff it up, Daley," said a voice, "and then we'll take a walk and fix you up with free room and board for a while. Let me have that dope. That's the idea."

Beans Daley nervelessly surrendered the pill box containing the drug. His heart stopped. Pinched! With the goods on him!

Cowering against the wall he flung up an arm protectively. His face twisted and twitched with a repellent blending of the snarl of a cornered rat and the cringing of a coward. He wanted to fight but hadn't the guts. He wanted to whine but had no voice. Pinched! With that diamond pin in his pocket!

The detective looked at him with amused disgust.

"What's the matter with you?" he asked. "What you throwing the fit for? You just had a shot. Snap into it and come on."

Terror gave back the power it had snapped from Daley's muscles. He turned and ran, blindly, desperately,

hopelessly, into a hallway which ended with a blank wall! He went limp again as the detective caught his arm and shook him. Pinched! Cripes!

"What in hell's eating you?" asked his captor. "Are you coked crazy or haven't you been going sky? Snap into it, Dope. You're not going to the chair. You're only going over to keep the boys company on the Island."

The Island! That got to him. The Island! He seized upon hope. He wouldn't be sentenced to the Island for a job like he had pulled. That was good for Sing Sing. Then——

Cripes! Where was his head? This cop was on the dope squad, wasn't he? Then——

"What for?" gasped Daley.

The detective laughed.

"For three months or maybe six. This is your first trip, isn't it?"

Daley nodded. Fear still smothered him but through it shone a light. He wasn't pinched for the robbery. All they had on him was that he took dope. That didn't mean anything. They'd send him to the Island for three or six months to cure him. Cure hell!

"Say," he begged, "lemme have a shot, will you? I'm all in. You see how I lost half the stuff when you jumped me. Lemme have just a little shot. I'm all in. Honest I am. Just a shot——"

He grimaced ingratiatingly, pleading, stalling while he figured how he might unload the diamond pin. If that were found on him he was done. Clammy fear pressed close on him again. He mopped his face with a rag of a handkerchief.

The detective gave him a shot. What difference did it make? This officer and his superiors were aware that the sending of Beans Daley and his kind to an institution was a simple waste of money. They never would be cured of the drug habit. But an order was out to round them up; some of them could be made to talk and point the way to get at the distributors.

As he started for headquarters, Daley stuffed his handkerchief into the pocket containing the pin which held for him the threat of a long prison term. Unnoticed by the detective the handkerchief with the pin inside it was dropped into a waste-paper can on a street corner.

Beans Daley grinned when booked on a charge of using and possessing drugs. Having to unload the pin was tough but not as tough as the stretch it would have got him. That was the last of it. Some ragpicker would gather it in. That was nothing. Plenty of the loot remained for him when he came back from the Island. And there was a chance the beads were genuine. Cripes!

CHAPTER XII.

There is a monotonous similarity in crime and for the police a monotonous routine. Few crimes present scope for the building up of a case from fantastic clews. Few crimes are off the beaten path. Ninety-nine per cent of the detective's job is plain grind. Ask, ask, ask, until somebody is found who can give the desired answer; that's it. Jones says Smith said—Smith says Brown said—Brown says Jones said—Jones said Robinson said. Follow the route from Jones to Smith to Brown to Robinson. Grind. Especially in cases of robbery.

The trail most often starts not at the scene of the robbery but from the plunder. A back trail. Locate some of the plunder and check up the hands it has passed through. The last man on the list must be the thief since he was first who had the property subsequently to its theft. Routine.

The Findlay robbery was typical. With nothing to suggest even remotely the identity of the thief he could not be directly pursued. The description

of Beans Daley given by the Hazelbrook Station agent was hazy, indefinite, worthless. Leaving aside the possibility of his being handed up by a stool pigeon or an enemy, he would never be arrested unless back-trailed from his loot. So the New York Police Department simply added the missing jewelry to the stolen property list and continued tranquilly about its business. Until some part of the loot showed up nothing more could be done. Meanwhile the channels through which stolen jewelry passes and the outlets through which it finally returns in some form to the surface would be watched in the usual way. Purely a routine case.

The manner in which it was working out also was typical. The curve was moving steadily to join its ends.

CHAPTER XIII.

Mrs. Burdette Findlay was speeding to get the fifteen thousand dollars which Vic Morrison and Jake Kramer aimed to collect, and Beans Daley was being locked up, when Kelly Martin's girl exercised poor judgment. Had she consulted Martin it never would have happened. But he had gone out when she decided that she didn't like the antique setting of Mrs. Burdette Findlay's solitaire.

According to her taste, such a stone should have a Tiffany setting in a slender ring so it would show like a house afire. She took it to a jeweler to have it reset.

This was partly Kelly Martin's fault. He should have told her the ring was raw. She supposed it was safe enough. That he had got it in a crap game, perhaps—or somewhere she didn't have to worry about.

The jeweler, too, was partly to blame. He was careless. He also supposed the ring could stand daylight. If it couldn't, she should have said so. He'd have known better himself if the lookout list of Mrs. Burdette Findlay's jewels had been circulated but that was only then being printed. Not knowing, he was careless to the extent of leaving the ring openly on his desk inside the grill at the end of his counter for half a minute after Kelly Martin's girl went out.

During that half minute a detective of the pawnshop squad came into the store on his daily round. His eye lighted on the ring. He noticed also that the jeweler had made a motion as if to conceal it. Mrs. Burdette Findlay's jewelry was fresh in his mind; and it included a four-carat solitaire with an antique setting.

"Where'd you get it?" he rapped.

"A woman left it," stammered the jeweler who knew that the police had him tabbed as a fence.

"Is it on your books?"

"It's for repairs—I'm just entering it."

"Do you know the woman?"

The jeweler hesitated. "No-o." The name is Johnson. Mary Johnson. She didn't give any address."

Palpably it was a lie. The detective was about to say so when he thought of the woman who had left the store as he approached it. A flashy-looking girl who drew the eye. He'd know her again. She couldn't be far away.

Stepping to the door he saw her looking into a window in the adjoining store.

Kelly Martin's girl was highly indignant when invited to step into the jeweler's. Why should she? She certainly had not just come from there! She never had been in it—never!

That was bad judgment; but she was frightened by this rapid descent upon the ring and upon her. Also, the spontaneous thought of what Kelly Martin would say—and do—to her was not comforting.

Protests didn't prevent her being brought face to face with the jeweler. She never had seen him before.

He had to back up her denial or suffer the consequences. If he gave away a customer he would ruin the most profitable part of his business. Worse than that, if he gave away Kelly Martin's girl he would ruin his health completely and would die suddenly. Therefore he never had seen her before.

Their team work was good but their tactics were not. They couldn't bluff through. His receipt for the ring was in her purse. It spoke for itself and nailed them.

Kelly Martin's girl had to send for him to arrange bail for her. And so:

Routine. The ring—the jeweler—Kelly Martin's girl—Kelly Martin——

CHAPTER XIV.

Before she reached New York, Mrs. Burdette Findlay was practically on her knees begging her driver to make speed. He had just received his third summons for speeding within half an hour.

"It's all right for you," he argued rebelliously, "but how about me? I'm in as deep as I'm going and that's deep enough. Yes, ma'am. I've taken three tickets already and that's plenty to knock my license for a blow-out. Then where am I at? How do I eat?"

Because his protest was legitimate she had to plead and promise.

"It is important, Burke," she almost wept, "dreadfully important. I'll see that you don't lose your license. I assure you of that. I can explain why you were speeding. Truly I can. I take all responsibility. Please, please hurry."

He continued crawling along painfully well inside the speed limit.

"Yeh," he said, "but 'tain't you that's got to explain. I'm the guy. And if I draw any more tickets this trip the chances are I'll get sixty days hung on me besides losing my license. With three tickets in a row I'll be lucky if I get by without a reckless driving charge. I'm sorry, ma'am, but that's how it is. You're a good boss to work for and I'll go as far for you as the next guy but you see——"

"Oh!" She beat her hands together despairingly. It was maddening to be delayed like this when minutes meant so much. "If I could only explain to you —make you understand——"

She broke off thoughtfully, suddenly calmer. Why shouldn't she explain? She could trust Burke. And should it be necessary to keep the fifteen thousand dollars in the house for any length of time she would have need of some one she could trust. Some sort of guard would have to be maintained over the money. Detectives wouldn't do. She would require some one who would follow her wishes unquestioningly; some one she could depend upon not to attempt interference when the time came to turn over the money for the jewelry. Why not get Burke to stand guard, and tell him enough of the situation to gain his coöperation now in what might be a race against time?

"I'm asking you to help me get back my jewels, Burke," she said earnestly. "It is in connection with them that I'm hurrying to New York. I have heard from the thief and he offers to return them for—for a certain amount. I'm going now to get the money but unless we hurry it may be too late. I may be called upon at any moment for the money and if it isn't ready I quite probably never will see my jewels again. Will you help me, please?"

"Well——" Burke wavered. As he had remarked she was a good boss, easy to work for and generous. "Well——" His foot came down slightly on the gas and the speedometer registered three more miles per hour.

"I'll go to court with you," she urged, "and tell why you were speeding. I take all the blame but if you should lose your license your wages will go on just the same. You have nothing to lose, Burke. I value some of the miss-

ing jewels very highly. Get me to New York and home as fast as you can drive and—and I'll give you a thousand dollars!"

"I'm not holding you up for any thousand," rumbled Burke. "You help me out in court and——"

The car shot forward again. Fortune favoring them they reached the bank with only one more summons added to his collection.

Telephoning home she was further agitated when informed by her maid that a man had phoned twenty minutes ago, at one o'clock.

"He asked for you," related the maid, herself excited without knowing why, "and insisted that he must talk with you. I asked him, as you told me, if he had a message for you to go motoring. He said yes and I said you had gone to New York for something——"

"Yes, yes," interrupted her mistress. "And what did he say? Hurry, girl, hurry!"

"He said all right, he'd call again. I asked was that all the message——"

Mrs. Burdette Findlay hung up. He would call again! She couldn't risk missing the second call.

The bank teller stared as she presented her check and demanded fifteen thousand dollars in used ten and twenty-dollar bills.

"Tens and twenties," he repeated stupidly. "Why—uh," He was wondering if she had become demented or if perchance she was putting over a fast one! He dodged: "I haven't that much in my cage, ma'am. Will you see the cashier about it?"

The cashier was busy with a customer but she cut in with only the barest apology. Time—time was everything. If a second call found her absent there might not be a third. Her pearls were at stake. Nothing could be allowed to hinder her from retrieving them.

The significance of her request for so great a sum in used bills of small denomination, coming so quickly on the heels of the robbery, was apparent to the cashier. He ventured to hope that she was not acting without competent counsel. He trusted that she wouldn't regard him as a meddler but——

She was courteous, but worry over her treasured pearls made her somewhat curt. He had no difficulty in getting the idea that she was not there for advice but solely for fifteen thousand dollars of her own money. She got it; a parcel not much larger than a pound box of bon bons.

Starting for Hazelbrook, Burke smiled crookedly and agreed that he knew of no such thing as a speed law. With four tickets plastered on him what could a few more matter? He took another for forty-five miles an hour in the Bronx, along with an unmerciful bawling out from the cop who meanly escorted him to the city line. But on the whole his luck showed improvement. He made the return journey in ten minutes less than the trip cityward and got by with only two more arrests—for trifles of fifty and sixty-five miles an hour!

In a state approximating nervous prostration, Mrs. Burdette Findlay descended from the car. She was limp and breathless, but game.

"If ever you drive me over ten miles an hour," she gasped, smiling wanly, "I'll discharge you, Burke. It was terrible—terrible! Bring out my coupé now and leave it here. I'll want it—shortly. And—have you a pistol?"

"Right here, ma'am." He produced an automatic from back of his seat cushion.

"Put it in your pocket and come into the house. I have quite a sum of money here—and I'm rather nervous. I want you to stay near me while it's in the house. I don't believe there's any real danger but—I'm nervous. Do you mind?"

The chauffeur grinned all over him

self and shook his head. If there was to be a roughhouse he'd be there. She had said something about slipping him a thousand bucks. He wouldn't turn that down too flat when she got around to it. The way things were lining up it might not be as big a gift as it had seemed. He parked a wrench in his side pocket for use in the close-ups.

Mrs. Burdette Findlay gave a great sigh of relief when her maid said there was no further word. Her composure returned. The danger of her pearls being lost for good was past. With the fifteen thousand dollars on hand she was ready to ride forth and ransom them the instant she was summoned. She prayed it would be soon.

"Precisely what did the man say?" she asked.

"Very little," replied the maid. "He asked for madame, when you had gone out, where you had gone, and when you would return. I gave him your message and he said very well, he would call again. I asked if he cared to leave his name but he said no and hung up. That was all."

"What was his voice like? Did he speak like—like a gentleman or was he coarse?"

The maid smiled faintly. It was amusing to find madame so anxious to keep an appointment with a man she didn't know. A detective on the trail of her stolen jewels, of course, but even so, it was amusing.

"A very nice voice, madame," she spoke reassuringly. "A gentleman, I should say."

Madame sighed again, a minor dread lifting from her. In spite of the perfect form of the letters she had received she had feared that she would have to meet some rough person in completing the negotiations. Dealing with a gentleman, or one who had the address of a gentleman at any rate, would not be so awful.

Dismissing the maid with an admonition not to gossip, she put the parcel of money in the drawer of the desk on which the telephone stood and took up her vigil.

Burke appeared presently, announcing that the coupé was at the door. Motioning him to a chair she explained a little more of what was afoot and enlisted him to give her at least moral support in her prospective meeting with crooks.

"I'm expecting a telephone call," she said, "to take this money—somewhere. Before I start I'll tell you where I have to drive. Fifteen minutes after I leave I want you to follow and—and, well," she smiled a trifle nervously, recognizing the futility of this maneuver, "just keep your eyes open for my coupé. You understand?"

He thought he did and nodded.

"You want me to catch up——"

"No. You'll keep out of sight—fifteen minutes behind me. I'll drive about ten miles an hour and so will you. If you come within sight of my coupé and I'm not in it you'll know that something is—is wrong."

"You mean," he asked, blinking, "that there may be rough stuff and something happen to you?"

"It's possible, I suppose, but I don't really anticipate anything like that. It's silly, I know, but I'll feel less nervous if some one is following to see that I don't meet with any serious harm."

Burke was sincerely concerned.

"I won't be much use fifteen minutes late," he objected. "Why don't you take me along? I can lay on the floor of the car if you're supposed to be alone——"

"No. Thanks, Burke, but that wouldn't do. If you should be seen, the person I'm to meet would undoubtedly take alarm. Just follow as I say, please. I'm sure I'll be quite all right. Will you do that?"

"I sure will, ma'am," said Burke stoutly, deciding to do some more

speeding and cut down the fifteen-minute headway regardless of her prohibition. "Are you going to get your jewelry?"

"Ye-es." She didn't know why she made the assertion hesitantly. Certainly she was going to get her jewels. "Yes," she repeated more confidently.

"Can't the cops get them?"

"They might," she granted, "but I prefer not run the risk of their failure."

"Huh," grunted Burke, "they can't do their job but they let you take chances with a bunch of crooks. Then if you get your jewelry back yourself that lets them out. Swell cops, I'll say."

He took the matter to heart as a personal grievance and nursed it while they waited for the next move. Cops! He added it to a justifiable peevishness toward detectives which Scanlon and Rowland had engendered with their insinuation that he and the maid were implicated in the robbery. Cops! A fine lot of cheese they were!

As the afternoon wore on, Mrs. Burdette Findlay's thoughts also focused on what the detectives were or were not doing. More particularly she wondered about her star specimen, Mr. Morrison of the Universal Investigation Bureau, who had so neatly talked her into admiration of his great ability! She had heard nothing from him since they consulted on the first ransom letter the previous night and drafted the advertisement accepting its terms.

What was he doing? What had he done since then? Was he still at work, closing in on the thief, or was he marking time in accordance with his promise to leave her a free hand to bring her negotiations to fruition? The promise for which she in her agitation had contracted to pay him five thousand dollars—for doing nothing! She was endlessly puzzled over the readiness with which she had accepted Mr. Morrison at his self-professed value. Her exasperation with Scanlon and Rowland had made her ridiculously receptive; almost childishly credulous.

There was no other explanation. An enterprising young man, confident, plausible. She would keep her word, naturally, and pay him the five thousand dollars. But would she ever know whether he was actually in a position to earn it through his own unaided efforts? After he received the money she might get him to tell her truthfully.

Musing on that helped her through the suspenseful hours of waiting for the telephone message which did not come.

CHAPTER XV.

The Hazlebrook police chief and the station agent were deep in their fruitless search of the rogues' gallery for Beans Daley's picture when they were called into the detective bureau and shown the first of the loot to be recovered.

Popping with excitement the chief was for rushing to the phone and telling Mrs. Burdette Findlay of this success. The New York officers were more conservative. They knew how long a row might have to be hoed before anything more was turned up.

"Wait a while," they advised him, "or you'll have her jumping all over us for not getting all the stuff within the next half hour. That's the way most folks act. As soon as they see some of their stuff recovered they think that if we turn our heads around we'll get the rest of it. They don't figure that a case like this gets scattered, especially if there's two or three got a finger in the pie. This ring isn't anything. There may not be another bit of the jewelry in town. Let her worry a while longer without any news till we make the girl and this jeweler fellow talk. There's no use shouting before we get something out of them."

Being dependent upon them for the

pursuit of this lead the chief took their advice and didn't telephone. He fidgeted during the long and repetitious interrogation of Kelly Martin's girl and the jeweler, which apparently made no progress. When finally she asked for Kelly Martin and refused to answer any more questions, the chief was mildly fretful. That was because he wasn't used to the dull routine of digging with its most frequently meager results. Her call for Kelly Martin to bail her out didn't mean progress to him; he supposed Martin was a lawyer.

"We're getting on," said the city detectives cheerfully. "We didn't know that she's Kelly Martin's girl. She's a new one he's got. Who's Kelly Martin? He's a crook we'd give an eye to get good. Now we'll bring him in. A house job like this is out of his usual line but he may be branching out. Wait till we look him over and perhaps you'll have something worth phoning. You go finish looking over the gallery while we pick him up."

Thus, much against the chief's inclination, the afternoon went by without Mrs. Burdette Findlay being informed that a trail had been struck.

Which was just as well for Vic Morrison's little scheme to amass fifteen thousand dollars. Had she known of these developments in New York she could only have viewed the ransom proposition with proper suspicion. So viewing it she would have been in just as great a hurry to replace that same fifteen thousand dollars behind the doors of a strong-room as she had been to get it out.

Kelly Martin was located late in the afternoon and told that his girl wanted to see him.

"What's the row?" he asked, recognizing his informant as a detective. "What's she want?"

"Mostly bail, I guess."

"What for? What's the damn' fool done?" He said more.

"We're holding the charge open. Better come and talk with her. She's rattled."

Kelly Martin thought rapidly. He couldn't figure anything she could be arrested for—except possibly the ring he had given her last night. He scouted that idea. Even if Beans Daley had been arrested for lifting it he'd have sense enough not to squawk about how it had been taken away from him. Daley knew too well what such a squawk would cost him.

Yet it seemed that Daley must have done just that. There was nothing else that Babe could be taken for. Nothing that anybody knew anything about. Daley had yelled—the rat!—and the dicks had gone looking for Martin. Coming up with Babe they had seen the ring on her finger and pinched her. Now they wanted him, too. He'd find out.

"I'm busy now," he said. "I'll drop over and see her after a while. Where's she at?"

"Headquarters." The detective shifted his chew from one cheek to the other. "Better come along now, I guess. The chief wants to see you."

"Oh, all right," said Kelly Martin obligingly. "Let's get it over with and spring her. What d'you say is the row?"

"Something about a ring," he was told with the presumption that this was a broad enough hint.

Kelly Martin scheduled the finish of Beans Daley, the blistered hophead! Who'd he think he was making trouble for? He'd know!

"Ring?" he said, fishing to see how bad it was. "What ring?"

"A diamond," said the detective, watching him. "A ring out of the stuff from that job up in Hazelbrook a couple of nights ago."

"What?" Martin stopped in his tracks, utterly surprised, putting two and two together. Beans Daley in on that job!

The detective stopped as suddenly and grabbed his arm.

"Don't get excited," said Martin softly. "I'm not making a get-away. I'm laughing! You're making me laugh. What's the rest of the joke?"

"That's about all just now."

They started forward again, the detective treading warily a half pace to the rear. He loosened his gun in its holster. There wasn't going to be any get-away.

"Let's hear the rest of it," grinned Martin while inwardly he cursed both his girl and Daley. "How'd she get picked up with the ring? You tell me and then I'll slip you the best part of of the joke. Go ahead."

"Then you know what ring it is?"

"I guess so. Sure."

The detective also fished: "We've got Samuels too."

"Samuels? Who's he?"

"The fence over on Sixth Avenue. You know. We're turning his place inside out for the rest of the stuff."

That was clear over Kelly Martin's head.

"I don't get you. How does this Samuels figure in?"

"You haven't an idea, huh?"

"Not a one. What's the answer? I'll fall."

The answer wasn't given. Instead: "What do you know about the ring?"

Kelly Martin stalled, unable to comprehend why Samuels the jeweler should be mentioned and not Beans Daley.

"You mean the ring I gave Babe last night, don't you? A big stone?"

"Yes."

"What's Samuels got to do with it?"

"Well," said the detective dryly, "he claims he was to reset it. Maybe he was. What do you think?"

Kelly Martin laughed—and double-damned Babe for a double dumb-bell! He began to see daylight. She had taken the diamond to be reset and had got jammed in a raid on Samuels' place. Beans Daley wasn't in the picture at all.

"About that ring," he said, "I'll tell you what I know and here's where the joke comes in—on you! I found that hoop rolling all by itself over on Kenmare Street—and that's all there is to that. Go ahead and laugh. I'm laughing myself. You don't think I'd be sap enough to let a rock like that fly loose if I knew it came from somewhere, do you?"

And there the trail went dark. Kelly Martin also was arrested. But what of that? It was a blind pinch. He could produce witnesses who had seen him find the ring! All he wanted of them. He could not be tied up with the robbery itself. He had been with a party at Coney the night it took place. Any flathead could beat the case they were trying to make against him and his girl and the jeweler. Even a cop would be able to see that, once they checked up on his movements and his pals. Work for the cops; that's all there was in it.

Kelly Martin didn't pass the buck to Beans Daley and have done with it for the good reason that now he knew of the rich haul, he was looking forward to slapping Daley's ears around his head until he came through with the whole bundle. He didn't know that Daley was in jail and headed for the Island.

CHAPTER XVI.

Vic Morrison was crowing. He had been doing so continuously to himself all the afternoon and intermittently aloud. He burst out again:

"Little Vic and his shiny gold shield didn't put it over big, eh, Jake? Oh, no! Can't you see the hen grabbing her check book and beating it for the bank when she got the orders to stand to! Lord, I almost gave three cheers when the girl on the phone asked if I was going to take madame out riding!

Take her for a ride is right! 'Madame has gone to New York for the package,' " he mimicked Mrs. Burdette Findlay's maid, " 'and will be ready to go motoring as soon as she returns!' For the package, Jake, get that. Some package! That's putting it over, isn't it, like a riot!"

Jake Kramer yawned. He'd been hearing the same song for hours. Assured as they seemed of success, he still had his doubts. The sailing had been too easy. He was reconciled to encounter a bust at the last moment.

"Let's pull it off now," he said, "before something breaks wrong. What's the sense of waiting if she's got the cash all ready to carry away? It's a lot of jack, Vic, and it's not going to take much to scare her into burying it under the house so we'd need dynamite to find it. Let's go after it now and crash the job over."

"You know better than that, Jake," chided Morrison. "If we go switching around at this stage of the game, something will get balled up. We've made the program and we'll run it through. Come on and take a walk."

Kramer didn't want to walk. He changed position in his chair restlessly.

"Why don't we let her drive out and stick her up on the road?" he asked. "That's a good idea. Where's the sense in throwing it away and go fooling around the house?"

"The sense in it is that although she's a mark she's not absolutely dumb. If we gave her a road to ride over she could bottle us up with half a dozen fast cars and block every road against us. Expecting to be called out, she won't look for anybody dropping in at the house and taking the cash."

"She won't," said Kramer perversely, "unless she's got the half-dozen cars right there loaded with huskies, like she will have if she aims to pull any tricks. Where'll we be at if we run into a mob?"

Morrison shook his head.

"You're looking for trouble where there isn't any. Suppose she has an army ready to turn loose. She wouldn't park them at the house where we could get a line on them simply by driving by. She'd park them somewhere else and give the word by telephone after we phoned her where to head. Lay off crabbing, Jake. Wish you were in Chicago some more and feel happy. You coming for a walk?"

"Nah. What time do we start?"

"Eight o'clock is time enough. That's only a couple more hours and will get us there by ten. I'll go in then and stall her with the dope that we've got our man cornered and can take him if she'll let us go to it. She won't—not when she's all set to buy her stuff back. If anything looks phony I'll back out and flag you. If it's O. K. I'll argue with her until you're due to show up at eleven. Then we'll ride along and call it a day. It's the softest thing we ever took on, Jake, and the biggest. It's like picking daisies and just as pretty."

Jake Kramer yawned again.

"I'll say that when we're through. Want a drink?"

"No; and you"—he smiled but meant what he said—"don't want many more, either. You're liable to get rough, Jake, when you've had a few and this isn't that kind of a party."

He went out then, knowing that if he remained Kramer would indulge his contrariness by knocking over several drinks. Jake wouldn't get drunk but he might tank up enough to make him ugly in a pinch. He was the strong-arm member of the team and had been known to go too strong.

Vic Morrison intended to stroll for an hour while quietly reviewing the situation for possible flaws. He didn't believe any existed but Jake Kramer's dinning refrain that the machinery seemed suspiciously well lubricated had

not been entirely without effect. Persistent planting will grow something after a while in even the most barren soil; and in spite of his reiterated confidence a faint uncertainty had been planted in Vic Morrison's mind.

His scheme was sound enough, as had been proved a number of times. But fifteen thousand dollars was a powerful stack of money for any one to give up with so little argument as Mrs. Burdette Findlay appeared to be giving up; even for such an article as her necklace which had a great extrinsic as well as intrinsic value. He wondered—h'm!—but promptly strangled the germ of doubt. He wouldn't admit it, but he was shouting to keep up his confidence if not his courage.

A block from the flat he stopped at a newsstand and bought a late edition to take his thoughts off his venture for a few minutes. His glance ran over the baseball and racing results that crowded the front page. At the foot of a column a short item caught his eye —reporting the arrest of Kelly Martin's girl and the jeweler and the recovery of one of Mrs. Burdette Findlay's rings!

Vic Morrison with slow-moving, tight lips, cursed vitriolically. There went the ball game! Blooey in the ninth inning when it seemed already won! Bang, went fifteen thousand dollars—like a busted balloon! Hell and starvation! Hell and——

But was it the finish? He looked at his watch. Six thirty. The arrests had been made this afternoon. What if Mrs. Burdette Findlay had not heard of them until late—too late for her to return the fifteen thousand dollars to a bank? She would then have to keep the money in the house overnight. Perhaps not. Though too late to bank it, she might have had her lawyers take care of it; or placed it in the vault of some business firm. She might—and again she might not. Suppose the news had not reached her before six o'clock? She wouldn't have had time to transfer the money to a place of security. There would be nothing for her to do except hold it in the house. It was a chance worth taking!

Throwing away the newspaper Vic Morrison went briskly back to the flat. He wanted action; to find out without delay whether he was to win or lose.

"Thinking it all over, Jake," he said without any sign of the blighting news he had just read, "I guess you're right about snapping to it now. We can't get any more by waiting and the trick is just as safe now as it'll ever be. I'm ready to start now if you are. We can't get there before eight and it'll be dark by then. That's all we need."

Jake Kramer stared at him, sensing a reason behind this abrupt change of mind.

"What's broken loose?"

"Not a thing," said Morrison evenly.

"Did you phone the dame while you were out?"

"No. I walked around the block—and got your angle. I'm getting jumpy myself over waiting. So let's go."

Nodding, Kramer got up. The suspicion that Morrison was holding back something departed. If anything had gone wrong Morrison wouldn't be walking into it.

Having gained a point, as he thought, Kramer went after another.

"I'm for cutting out the gumshoe work," he declared. "Let's can the business of sneaking round among the bushes. You're going to be tabbed in the deal anyhow. You can't get away with your bunk dick stuff after this comes off. Let's both drive right in and crash the gate on your face, then stick the dame up and let it go at that. To hell with the other business."

"Maybe we'll do that," said Morrison. "We can talk it over as we go."

He said that only because he wished to avoid fostering his partner's mo-

mentary suspicion by yielding too much. The point was already decided. The situation was most materially altered by the arrests and the recovery of the ring. Putting aside all flub-dubbery and pretense he was going in now with both hands and feet to get the fifteen thousand dollars he had brought within reach—if it were still gettable.

Their preparations for this enterprise of propagated robbery were slight. They looked to their guns. Jake Kramer quickly pocketed two wide surgical bandages and a roll of adhesive tape; the most easily carried, most innocent-appearing, and most useful articles for binding and gagging a person.

"A good luck drink," said Kramer.

Morrison hesitated, frowning over the unbidden thought that they could use some luck. He didn't like to feel that way. He preferred the luck that came naturally without having to be hocus-pocused into being with potations and crossed fingers and the like.

"All right," he said.

"Here's to Chi," said Kramer over his glass. "I don't like this town. Here's to a snappy good-by!"

"That's no news," said Morrison. "It won't like you in a couple more hours. Come on."

The roadster he had hired by the day was at the door. They were off.

CHAPTER XVII.

From across the street two observers watched them go.

"There's something funny about that bird," said Scanlon, ex-operative of the Moon Detective Agency. "You can't tell me. There's something funny."

Rowland, also an "ex," nodded dejectedly. They had been fired at midday when their chief, having learned through New York police channels of the suspect seen by the Hazelbrook station agent, wanted to know why they hadn't passed this information to the office and what they had to report on him. That drew a roar from Scanlon, out of which could be sorted his conviction that said suspect was the bunk, a prop set up to distract attention from an inside job and an insurance swindle. One roar leading to another, he was outroared with the statement that he was fired. Rowland given no opportunity to get a word in even edgewise and having nothing to say anyway, went down with the wreck. He was still staggering from the blow.

This climax to their weighty inactivity on the case had occurred but an hour ago. Other Moon operatives had even then taken over the assignment and were trying to catch up on the case by conferring with the Hazelbrook chief and the station agent at New York Police Headquarters. Here they had fallen right into the midst of the case and got a fast start on the Kelly Martin lead of which Scanlon and Rowland were blissfully ignorant.

In marked contrast to Rowland, Scanlon was not depressed. Being fired made him, if possible, more effervescent. He frothed. And he picked on Vic Morrison as the cause of all their troubles. Morrison was the bird who had the inside track and was in on the fifteen-thousand-dollar stall. Morrison was the bird who had built up the bunk about a whole carload of crooks. Morrison, he declaimed in a nutshell, was being paid by Mrs. Burdette Findlay to lay down a phony trail.

And who was Morrison, anyhow?

Scanlon had been asking that question since he first set eyes on Morrison twenty-four hours ago. On his return to New York to-day following his stormy scene with Mrs. Burdette Findlay he had gone after the answer. To a certain extent this had not been difficult. With his fixed belief that the robbery had not been committed from the outside he had viewed with suspicion everybody that he had seen ap-

proach the house. How did he know but that one of them might be in on the job? Might even be carrying away the stuff!

Consequently he had jotted down the license number of the roadster before he was informed that Morrison was a detective. Looking up the records he found that the license had been issued to an auto-renting company. Using his badge he got all that the company knew about Morrison—his name and address, the bank reference he had given, that he had left a deposit of three hundred dollars on the car, and paid three days' rental in advance.

The loss of his job turned his wrath more violently toward Morrison. He had half of the answer to his angry question. He wanted the other half. When he got it and knew exactly who and what Morrison was, he hoped ravenously that he would be able to get back at him and Mrs. Burdette Findlay by ripping the robbery open as a fake!

So it came about that Scanlon and Rowland—the latter dragged along uninterested but unresisting—witnessed the departure of Vic Morrison and Jake Kramer for the end of their rainbow. Also, when Morrison walked to the corner and bought a newspaper a few minutes earlier Scanlon had trailed him. When Morrison threw away the paper Scanlon read no special meaning in the action. It was a sport sheet and he assumed that it had been bought simply to see how some horse had finished.

Now, however, it occurred to Scanlon that Morrison had stepped lively on the way home. And then he and the other fellow had rushed away in the car. If they had such a hurry date as appeared why had Morrison wasted time walking out to look at the race results? On the way to the newsstand he hadn't seemed in any rush. Then all of a sudden he was. A race result couldn't have touched him off like that. What had?

Scanlon had a one-track mind but it was far from being a total loss. It functioned ably enough when it could fasten upon something within the immediate groove. Granting, then, that Morrison had decided suddenly to go somewhere it was not unreasonable to suppose that his decision was due to something he saw in the paper. Something about the robbery! Something unexpected that had startled him!

The discarded newspaper was in the gutter halfway down the block. Scanlon went for it with Rowland straggling after.

The item about Kelly Martin's girl and the ring gaped at them. Rowland groaned. Scanlon swore luridly.

"A plant," he barked, consistent in his pig-headedness. "A plant. More of this fancy bird Morrison's bunk. To make the job look real he slips this ring to some sucker and tips a cop to walk in on it! He's good, this bird is, and he'll put the job over yet."

Rowland wasn't so sure. He mumbled doubt.

"Say, listen," snapped Scanlon, riding his prejudice. "This Morrison is supposed to be working on the case, ain't he? Well, is he? Do you call sitting home working? Like hell it is! He was sitting home waiting for this ring to be turned up. He'd have turned it up himself only that wouldn't've been so good as a regular cop turning it up. See? And now he's gone charging down to headquarters to make motions and steer them wrong some more! If they don't hang the suckers they've pinched before he gets through, I'll admit maybe there was a robbery!"

Rowland wagged his head dolefully. The way things looked, they had flopped completely on a good case. Perhaps he could go back to bricklaying. He had been a good bricklayer——

"How about going down to headquarters and seeing what they've got?" he suggested half-heartedly.

"You stick with me," said Scanlon aggressively. "I'm not through yet—not by a mile. That fancy bird can't razz me! He's got my job but I'm going to get him—and the dame he's doctoring the job for! You stick with me and we'll show the damn' crooks something!"

"That's an idea," said Rowland feebly, automatically, "but how do we do it?"

"We do what we should've done at the start," snapped Scanlon. "We say to hell with everybody and make somebody talk! Let's get a train. We're going back to that dump."

They caught the last train of the rush-hour service at seven o'clock. Rowland went apathetically, a led sheep. Scanlon went bull-headedly, determined to show somehow that this was an inside job and a fake.

Kelly Martin was then being put over the hurdles at police headquarters while detectives scurried out to sift over his friends and check up his statements as to where he had been the night of the robbery at Hazelbrook. They expected to find his alibi secure, but with him claiming to be a dead end on their chain they could only plug along, pecking, digging, questioning, here and there and everywhere, in the effort to discover how Mrs. Burdette Findlay's solitaire had come into his possession.

There were loose tongues in Kelly Martin's world as elsewhere; and there were ears which for divers reasons not unrelated to the freedom of their owners were to all intents and purposes police ears listening to the whisperings.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Vic Morrison noticed a change in the attitude of Mrs. Burdette Findlay the moment he and Jake Kramer were ushered into the room where she and Burke were keeping watch and ward. She was not uncordial but it was evident that she had receded from him since their last meeting. He didn't need that much, charging it to the strain she was under. She looked worn and her gaze went constantly to the telephone beside which she had been waiting in vain for six hours.

He wasn't concerned about her attitude, her lack of welcome. He was concerned about the presence of the chauffeur, although he could have asked for no straighter tip than this on whether or no he was in time. Undoubtedly the chauffeur was there as a guard—which meant certainly that there was something to be guarded. What but the fifteen thousand dollars?

Yes. But why Burke's unfriendly eye—his dirty look? A stocky lad of solid weight, square-chinned and beetle-browed, he appeared unduly tuned up to be nasty. Why so toward men—detectives—whom his mistress had admitted without question? Why the dirty look—and why was he sitting that way with his right hand out of sight between his half-turned body and the arm of his chair? It was readily conceivable that that hand might be on a gun. Why?

"One of my men," said Morrison by way of introducing his partner and ending the short but constrained silence following Mrs. Burdette Findlay's brief greeting; an interrogative silence on her part—and his. He advanced into the room, past Burke, to where she was standing by the phone. "I came out to ask you—something."

He broke off with a sidelong glance at Burke during which he noted the important fact that Jake Kramer was using his head satisfactorily. Kramer had come to a halt just inside the door, thus placing Burke at a tactical disadvantage since from the chauffeur's present position one or the other of them was beyond his immediate range of vision. Furthermore, should his attention be diverted for an instant to either Morrison or his mistress, Kramer was

in a useful position to rap him on the skull and put him out of reckoning!

"It's all right to talk, isn't it?" added Morrison, looking at her again. Why the devil was Burke sitting there with his dirty look and a gun? Simply because of the money? Or because word from New York had punctured the whole play and aroused her suspicions? "Your driver, I take it," he went on stalling as she said nothing, "knows the whole situation? I may speak out, may I not?"

She nodded slowly, restrainedly, thinking that he had come to delve into the ransom negotiations and resenting his coming because of their understanding that he was to keep hands off. She didn't want him there; he should know that. She didn't want any one who might, through even the most well-meant effort, hinder the direct recovery of her jewels which she believed was imminent. In view of their arrangement that he was to get the five thousand dollars reward for suspending his activity in the case, he had no business there at all. Then why had he come? To ask something, he had said. She had nothing more to tell him. There was nothing that he couldn't have asked over the telephone.

Her manner grew more distant, plainly rebuking.

"The situation is quite unchanged, Mr. Morrison," she said in much the tone she would have used to the despised Scanlon, "if that is what you have come to ask. There is nothing more I can tell you. I don't think that anything can be gained by discussing the case in any way at present."

That was clear enough—so emphatically clear that Vic Morrison was doubtful. It seemed impossible that she had not heard of the arrests and the recovery of her ring. Yet if she had been advised and so made suspicious of the proposition to return the loot, why was she camping so fidgety beside the phone? Awaiting further word from New York perhaps. That was possible and would explain Burke and the gun!

Vic Morrison took pause as his thoughts flew on. If she had come to doubt the good faith of the letter writer might she not fear a raid on the fifteen thousand dollars which he had induced her to bring to the house? Anticipating that, she would surely have taken greater precautions to protect the money than now appeared. There would be others on guard besides Burke. Others surrounding the house ready to close in should the attempt be made.

Jake Kramer coughed, hinting for action. He had a feeling that the affair was kinked somewhere. A cog had slipped; or was slipping. For one thing, he couldn't see any sign of Mrs. Burdette Findlay eating out of Morrison's hand as the latter had represented. For another, there was this guy with the gun who looked as though he were spoiling to cut loose. He glowered at Burke; and Burke, his grievance against detectives well nourished, glowered at him. Kramer didn't like the situation and didn't like Burke whom he decided to flatten thoroughly with the first crack. Burke didn't like him and, measuring with his eye, regretted only that he had no excuse for registering his dislike with violence.

Mrs. Burdette Findlay also got the notion that there was something peculiar in the situation. The way Morrison was studying her, for instance. And the way Kramer was glowering at her chauffeur. In fact it was all very peculiar—not the least noteworthy oddity being her pending gift of five thousand dollars to Morrison who apparently didn't know enough to earn it as she desired by doing nothing but remain inactive in the background. If he had indeed come with some question why on earth didn't he ask it and get out? Why had he found it necessary to bring this man who was staring at Burke?

A new attack of nerves threatened her, not due to fear of the ultimate loss of her pearls but to some closer menace. She couldn't explain the feeling—but she wished most heartily that Morrison would state his errand and go.

Seeing the sudden scariness in her face Vic Morrison proceeded to find out precisely how the land lay and keep matters within his control. She had said she had nothing more to tell him. Could he tell her anything?

"Haven't you heard from New York" he asked, plunging.

"From New York?" she said with obvious sincerity. "No. What are you referring to?"

He motioned, smiling, but didn't answer at once. He had to be very sure he wasn't walking into a trap.

"If we can arrest the thief," he queried, watching every flicker of her expression, "and recover your property, have we your permission to go ahead? I'm holding, you see, to the agreement not to act without your permission. But if you will allow us to——"

"No, no," she interrupted. "I don't want you to do anything that would interfere—with my plans."

"But if we have our hands on the thief?" he pressed.

"That makes no difference," she asserted firmly. "I have my plans made——"

"Ah," he nodded understandingly, "then you've had another letter—some further word? The negotiations are really under way?"

"Ye-es." She glanced involuntarily at the drawer in which was the fifteen thousand dollars—and his glance followed hers! "Yes," she said, her gaze going longingly to the phone, "I am quite satisfied with—everything as it is."

"All right. That's what I wanted to know." He changed his position as though about to withdraw but actually so that by a flirt of his eye he could see Burke. "Oh," he seemed to remember, "you've heard nothing at all from New York?"

"No." She shook her head perplexedly, disturbed by the repeated question. "What has happened there? What could I have heard?"

Probing deep for a still more positive reaction he gave her the truth.

"A woman was arrested with one of your rings this afternoon. A woman and the jeweler she took it to to have it reset. Wait! Please!"

She cried out with a mingling of gladness and dread, "Are you sure?"

"There's no doubt," he said, observing that he had all Burke's attention. "The big solitaire—that's the one. We were shadowing her but weren't ready to make an arrest when the police stepped in and took her. That's why I came to consult with you. Her arrest will frighten off the man you're dealing with and unless we grab him quick he may slip away. If you've made all arrangements to deal with him, that of course——"

She nodded eagerly, looking again at the desk drawer.

"The thing to do is keep cool," he said softly, confident now that the money was there and that Burke was the only guard. "Keep cool, my dear madame, and don't lose your head. Keep your head and everything will come out all right. Don't get excited—don't get excited!"

"I—I won't," she said, responding again to the soothing, persuasive quality in his voice. "I won't, but I'm afraid that——"

Out of the corner of his eye he saw Burke bending toward him, watching and listening. He saw also Kramer poised for the word to pounce on Burke and fell him.

"Go!" he said sharply. "Stand still, woman, and quiet!"

Mrs. Burdette Findlay fell back against the wall and then stood still and

quiet—paralyzed and dumb under threat of an automatic pistol gaping wide as a cannon a short foot from her face!

Kicking the door shut Kramer struck!

Burke, too, was quiet but not still. The instant of warning that he had taken from Morrison's exclamation had saved him from the full force of the blow from Kramer's pistol. Instead of landing flush behind his ear the blow caught him farther back on the head, a glancing swipe, as he leaped from his chair. It didn't strike him insensible but it stunned both brain and muscle so that he stood swaying amid a whirl of stars.

Empty-handed, his own gun fallen from his nerveless fingers, he was helpless, out on his feet! Out—all but the fighting spirit that held him erect and spun him round to face the attack. Out—with only instinct guiding him as he threw himself into a clinch with the murderous enemy his glassy eyes could scarcely see.

Jake Kramer cursed as he missed another crushing blow with the gun. Burke got under it and clung tight, burying his head under Kramer's arm for protection from the battering weapon, holding on desperately while his senses slowly cleared and the deadness crept out of his muscles. If he could hold on for a couple of minutes —a minute——

As from far away he heard Morrison.

"Get him, Jake! Get him, damn you, before he raises the roof!"

The words gave Burke strength, telling him that Morrison could not come to his partner's aid. He couldn't—unless he struck down Mrs. Burdette Findlay. Would he go to that extreme? He might. Then this fight must be won before he could realize that Kramer was being bested. It must be won before Morrison realized that he must fell the woman and fly to Kramer's assistance.

But now Burke himself realized a deadly fact. In boring his head under Kramer's arm to shield it from the gun he had placed himself in another grave danger. Kramer's arm was banded close about his neck, strangling him and sapping again his returning strength!

"Get him!" rasped Morrison.

The gun crashed down cruelly on Burke's backbone, sending a racking agony throughout its length. He tried to twist away, to wriggle his head farther under cover. A blow like that only an inch or two higher, at the base of the brain, and—that would be all!

Again and again the gun fell, battering now at the topmost vertebra. He couldn't stand much more. Another smash—he was on his knees, going out this time—out!

His fighting spirit arose once more to sustain him. His right hand, losing its hold on Kramer, came into contact with the wrench in his side pocket.

The cold metal—a weapon—sent a tingle of new life, of hope, through him. He made a wild, blind, overhand swing with the wrench at Kramer's head—and connected!

Kramer's curse, an oath from Morrison, the ringing of the telephone, reached Burke in a blur of sound. A triumphant blur, it seemed. He had got in a blow! A good blow, judging by the shock to his own arm and the fact that the throttling grip on his neck relaxed as Kramer staggered back, dragging him.

He swung again with the wrench—but only threshed the air. He swung no more.

Kramer kicked him in the stomach, released his head, and hammered him senseless as he doubled up in torture!

Blood streaming from a gash the wrench had inflicted on his forehead, Kramer looked down at him—then

stooped with murder in his bloodied eyes and reached for the wrench! A better weapon that the butt of a gun—surer!

Vic Morrison let Mrs. Burdette Findlay collapse to the floor as she fainted. He let her go and ran to seize Jake Kramer's arm as it descended to do murder!

"For Heaven's sake, Jake!" he said in the fury of panic. "You've done enough! Let go!"

Splashing the blood from his eyes with his free hand, Kramer snarled up at him.

"I'll shoot you if you do, Jake!" swore Morrison. "So help me! I'll shoot you, Jake! He may be dead now! Think of that! No murder, Jake! Get your head! We've got to get out! You want to get to Chicago, Jake, don't you? Chicago, Jake! Come on! We get the cash now and get out! It's here—waiting! Let go, Jake! Go stop that cursed telephone before everybody in the place comes to see what's the matter!"

"Stop it yourself," snarled Kramer. "You led us into this, didn't you? Get to hell out if you want to! I'll look after myself—when I'm done with this——"

His voice stopped as a knock sounded on the door. Sanity returned to him. Surrendering the wrench to Morrison he took up his gun and got to his feet.

"Answer it," he whispered, pointing to the door as the knock was repeated.

Morrison nodded and pushed him toward the phone which was now giving off the steady *trring-trring-trring* of a plugged-in signal.

Kramer caught sight of Mrs. Burdette Findlay lying in a heap. He grabbed Morrison's arm, holding him from the door.

"Did you slug her?"

"Fainted," said Morrison. "Choke that damn' phone!"

He shook himself free to open the door and deal as circumstances might dictate with whoever was there. Get rid of him if possible; or tie him up with the chauffeur and the hen.

The door opened before he reached it. A maid, come to answer the telephone and entering on the assumption that the room was unoccupied, stared at her mistress huddled on the floor. Her hands fluttering foolishly, she opened her mouth to scream.

Morrison grabbed at her, his automatic threatening.

"Shut up or I'll shoot!"

Her screams blotting out his command she turned and ran.

Slamming the door Morrison also ran—to the desk containing the fifteen thousand dollars that was to be the prize in the biggest game he and Jake Kramer had ever played.

The desk drawer came open without effort. The fifteen thousand was in their hands!

Jake Kramer tore open the door giving onto the veranda. Hesitating on the threshold he waited for Morrison. A dash around an angle of the house and they would be in their car with a fair chance of winning clear.

Mrs. Burdette Findlay, coming to, sobbed and hid her face in her hands. Burke groaned. The telephone, which Kramer had left untouched when the maid screamed, rang the endless summons of someone who would not be denied.

"Out!" urged Morrison. "Run!"

"Like hell!" said Scanlon from the darkness of the veranda. "Stick 'em up and stand!"

Jake Kramer plunged out, shooting. Scanlon and Rowland fired—and Kramer was through.

Vic Morrison ran back across the room to escape through the house. Looking backward to exchange shots with the two detectives, he tripped over Burke and he, too, was through. Through—but not dead like Kramer!

The game they had come to teach New York was done. The game they had played so boldly and so well and would have carried through to victory but for a dope fiend's desire to make a flash with his loot!

And when somebody found time to answer the phone the Hazelbrook chief was on the line rejoicing over the recovery of all Mrs. Burdette Findlay's jewelry with the exception of the bar pin that had passed beyond recovery via a rubbish can. In the telling, he bubbled over the praise for the New York City detectives—who, albeit pleased by his laudation, smiled quietly as they listened. They knew that they had accomplished nothing wonderful. A fast break in the right direction and plenty of luck; that was all.

If Kelly Martin's girl hadn't been in such a rush to have that diamond reset, if the jeweler hadn't been careless, if one of the pawnshop squad hadn't happened in at just that moment, the case probably would have grown dusty among the unsolved. It probably would have grown dusty anyway if the story of how Kelly Martin sniped the diamond from Beans Daley hadn't tickled the funny bone of the underworld. For had it not spread quickly as a good joke, a stool pigeon might not have had it to peddle along when the police check-up on Kelly Martin was started.

Finally, if Beans Daley hadn't been in jail and so crying for dope that he was willing to give up all he had for a shot—even the first real loot he'd ever lifted; and the last he would see for several years—the end might have been long in coming. All simple routine. Brown to Smith, to Jones, to Robinson —Sing Sing!

Kelly Martin's girl? There was nothing on her. Nor on the jeweler. On Kelly Martin—maybe; but it would be hard to make stick the charge of receiving stolen property. Beans Daley had sold him the ring. How could he know it had been stolen?

And Scanlon, of course, with Rowland again profoundly and intelligently silent. Thus:

"I know that fancy bird's a crook the minute I see him! I'm only stalling, lady, with that inside-job bunk and the rough stuff I pulled on you! Stalling, that's what, to throw this fancy bird off his feet and get him right! We're right behind him all the time, me and Rowland, all the time, because we know he's a crook and figure if we stick to him we're going to turn up where we're needed!"

Mrs. Burdette Findlay looked at Burke whose head the doctor was bandaging; Burke considerably damaged but not seriously. Her mind went to the question of reward. She smiled at Scanlon—a friendly smile without any reflection on what he had just said. A rude fellow but not so utterly incompetent as had appeared. He also deserved some recognition.

"The reward," she asked, "who gets that?"

"The New York cops," said Scanlon. "Their pension fund anyhow."

"So," she said thoughtfully. "Very well. I'm going to duplicate it—another five thousand to be divided among you and Mr. Rowland and the Hazlebrook chief. For Burke——" She nodded; his injuries would pay him well.

"Sure, lady," said Scanlon, "that's all right, too. And say—you can put in a right word for us at the office."

"That's two ideas," murmured Rowland, sighing over how near he had come to relearning the art of bricklaying!

Boss o' the Rancho

By Edwin Hunt Hoover

Author of "Good Peace," "The Pin-wheeler," etc.

AFTER TWENTY-FIVE YEARS OF MARRIED LIFE, HERM VARNEY CONSIDERED HIMSELF BOSS OF HIS RANCH, AND DELEGATED UNTO HIMSELF THE POWERS OF REGULATING THE AFFAIRS OF HIS CHILDREN. SUBSEQUENT EVENTS PROVED HIM TO BE A MATCH MAKER EXTRAORDINARY. . . . . .

NOW, don't y'u make me laugh, dang y'u. I ain't in a laughin' humor, an' it makes me mad to laugh when I ain't so inclined," declared Herm Varney. "You an' your funny jokes," he glared at his daughter who dimpled primly in the shadow of her broad-brimmed Stetson—the dimpling being natural and the primness a concession to her parent's mood.

Herm's tirade was addressed, not at his daughter but at the tall, sunburned young cowboy standing modestly about one step to the rear of her. He sent his message of indignation through her because he felt that this indirect method of communication showed his aloofness to her companion.

"You—'Lin Kennard——" Herm, for the moment, forgot his aloofness and, realizing the tactical blunder, checked the flow of words.

"Yessir, Herm." Kennard started to put on his hat, but remembered that he was inside the Y. B. ranch house with a lady present and corrected the error immediately. "I knew all the time that you wasn't talkin' to Daisy, she hadn't been crackin' any jokes. But I thought y'u'd enjoy a laugh—havin' been on the prod so long."

"Well, I wouldn't." Varney twisted fiercely at one prong of his tawny mustache which was graying much faster than the sandy thatch, bristling with cowlicks, on his head. "I don't mind laughin' among folks I like, but I won't laugh at the smart Aleck jokes of a shiftless whippersnapper that works for Sid Hopewell at Rafter A an' rides chuck line half the time."

"Y'u don't like me?" 'Lin was shocked. A half grin that might have been sheer nervousness—or might not—tended to prove the depth of his hurt.

"No, I don't. Young buttons should be tendin' to business an' builidn' 'emselves up a stake before they go gallivantin' round aspirin' to matrimony with the daughters o' responsible cattlemen———"

"An' y'u don't want me to marry Daisy, neither?" Kennard inquired in painful surprise. "It looks as if I was plum' out o' luck."

His downcast eyes, somehow, caught

those of Daisy. But there was something in that exchange of glances that Varney didn't entirely understand, a sort of humility under duress that wasn't natural to a daughter of the Varneys or to a fresh youth like Orlin Kennard, whose continually bubbling mirth was subject to instant change when the occasion rose. Herm reflected that, worthless and good for nothing as 'Lin was, he had personality and courage. Hadn't he thrashed Bill Hobart within an inch of his life for a studied, premeditated insult to a Harvey House girl when nobody else in the Malindale dance hall had felt equal to the occasion? Of course, Bill, being a Y. B. puncher, hadn't been fired, because that act would have been an acknowledgment to Hopewell that a man from Rafter A had performed a deed of merit. And that would have been construed as a weakness on Varney's part in the twenty-four-year feud that had existed between Y. B. and Rafter A. Hobart had been quietly paid off and set on his way at a more appropriate time.

Still, Varney had a lurking admiration for Kennard. He also had an uncomfortable feeling—as he expressed it to his wife—that "This young sprout is hedgin' his bets. He gets respectful an' calls me 'Mr. Varney' when I gets on the peck with him. I can't augur with him when he gets that way."

"No, I don't want y'u to marry Daisy," Herm mimicked 'Lin's tone of humble respect and attempted to stamp a foot to indicate his displeasure and determination, but a spur caught on a stove leg and the gesture was not as noble as he had intended it to be.

"Love rules tha range," 'Lin tried to quote authentically.

"Not by a damn' sight!" Varney stormed. "Water rules the range. An' I've got control—from here to my Sunset ranch on the south, an' to the N'agua Strip on the north. Don't forget that!"

"No chance for an enterprisin' young fellow to horn in on some o' that range?" Kennard asked with his eyes on Daisy.

"Not a chance." Varney, bluff, hard-bitten and honest as his conscience allowed, was adamant. "Sunset goes to my son Harry when an' if he marries some one besides Martha Hopewell. Daisy don't get a dime, a hoof or a rod o' range if she don't hook up with a man I approve of. An' that man ain't goin' to be a Rafter A waddie, neither. Nor"—after a moment of frowning thought—"it won't be any young sprout whose future is limited to his next-month's pay check."

"If I could find me a ranch somewhere—would that have any bearin' on my eligibility for Daisy?" 'Lin put the question with all due humility.

"A Hopewell waddie havin' the infernal crust to aspire to my daughter!" Varney snorted. The thought stirred his ire. Yet another idea, cunning in conception, was forming in his mind. "I don't know why I let y'u keep on comin' here," he grumbled while milling over the new idea, which offered diplomatic possibilities in this wise: There was no chance for Kennard to acquire a ranch on the giant scope of territory occupied by the Y. B. and Rafter A herds. The two outfits, separated by the neutral N'agua Strip—fifteen miles of desert given over to rattlesnakes, prairie dogs, coyotes and jack rabbits—controlled a hundred miles of grazing land north and south, and half that mileage in breadth by reason of judiciously placed wells. Kennard would have to leave the country if he sought a domain of his own; and his absence would give Varney every opportunity to make different arrangements about his daughter. There was Jimmy Younger, over in the Pelican mountains, whose father had been a friend of Varney during a dozen trying years, and who was, himself, an upstanding, double-fisted,

ambitious man of affairs. There was——

"Maybe." 'Lin interrupted the train of thought, "you'd give me a job workin' for Y. B. till I can accumulate enough money to buy me a ranch. That would take the curse off my bein' a Rafter A puncher."

Varney rolled his eyes in mock despair. "If y'u had as much intelligence as nerve, y'u'd be a rich man. Fat chance that I'd put y'u to work here where y'u'll be building loops at Daisy 'stead o' ridin' to stock. No. But I'm a reasonable man, I am. I'll compromise, I'll make y'u a proposition. Come to me after y'u've built up a stake an', if Daisy's still of the notion that she wants y'u—why——"

"Oh, Dad!" Daisy's rounded arms circled Varney's corded neck in a clutch of violent affection. "That's a promise!"

"Leggo my hand—you 'Lin Kennard!" Varney repulsed the young man who took advantage of the moment of confusion by trying to "pump-handle" the cattleman. "I ain't shakin' hands with any Rafter A gent. Whatever consent I may ever give—which ain't likely at all—will be after y'u're off Hopewell's pay roll an' runnin' a layout of y'ur own. You got a long ways to travel, young feller me lad," he warned.

"Me? I'm almost arrived," declared Kennard. "All I need is a layout that provides a livin' for two. If I could show y'u a good enough proposition, would y'u loan me the mazuma to start operations?"

"Of all the gall!" Herm bristled. "I will not! *Nunca!* Never! Under no circumstances!" Then: "What were y'u figurin' on doin' with it in case I should 'a' loosened up?"

"Why, I didn't know but what Ephraim Younger, over in the Pelicans might sell out to me——"

Varney looked his disgust. "He might sell for fifty thousand dollars or thereabouts. But I ain't so anxious for a son-in-law that I'll buy him a meal ticket."

"I'd about made up my mind to that," 'Lin concurred, bashfulness and humiliation written large on his lean, bronzed features. "Well, I had another plan: There's a nice chance for some one to locate in those rollin' hills north o' Sunset ranch, between Sunset an' the next line camp."

"You go to hornin' in on that range and I'll stake y'u to seven foot o' ground!" Varney blazed.

"Y'u ought to wear a hat when y'u get in that frame o' mind," Kennard advised mildly. "Y'ur hair tries to leave the scalp. I didn't say that I was goin' to do anythin' of the sort; only I just wanted to call attention to the fact that, it bein' nine or ten miles between waters there, some enterprisin' homesteader could easy move in with his fam'ly an' live stock an' sink a well. Anyhow, I had a couple more schemes as to what I'd do if y'u'd bank me. I might drill for water on the N'agua Strip——"

"Drill an' be damned! Varney wasn't thinking about the N'agua Strip, but the menace to range control that Kennard had pointed out. He would instruct Harry to immediately move the drill rig from Sunset and plant it in a good, strategic position—to warn off pilgrims—until such time as Y. B. was ready to begin drilling operations—which might be never. But the drilling outfit would serve as informal notice of possession. This matter being disposed of, he addressed 'Lin with more tranquility and some scorn:

"I reckon y'u might strike water at about a thousand feet there on the Strip. At Sunset we got it at two hundred, an' at Acorn it was close to three hundred. Here, at headquarters, we got a flow at a three-hundred-an'-eighty-foot depth. The farther north, the deeper to water. It's four miles to the border o' the Strip from here——"

"How about Hopewell comin' south with his drillin'? He went deeper as he came in this direction. His camp at Hondo—about this same distance north o' the Strip—pumps from a depth o' three hundred an' sixty feet. That would seem to indicate that there's *veins* 'stead of a lake underneath this range." 'Lin was quite modest and deferential. "I—I'd always had a notion that if you'd 'a' sunk a hole over yonder"—he indicated, through the kitchen door a clump of cottonwoods on a rise less than a quarter of a mile distant—" 'stead o' here, you'd 'a' got a flow at, maybe, seventy-five feet or such a matter."

"Too bad y'u didn't show up on this range till six months ago," Varney remarked sarcastically, packing crimp cut tobacco into his pipe. "If y'u'd been here when I was drillin', you'd 'a' saved me a pile o' money by water witchin' for me."

'Lin sighed, looking moodily into the interior of his hat. "Likely my best bet is to pull my freight. I've got some friends in Colorado that would be glad to let me work into pardnership with 'em. It wouldn't take more'n a couple years to build up a stake that way. No doubt that's what I'll have to do. Daisy an' me were talkin' about it a while ago, but I didn't want to be so far away from her for so long."

"Good idea!" Varney commented with amiable hypocrisy. His plan was working out gratifyingly. "Another two years will put Daisy at twenty-one——"

"An' likely married to somebody else," 'Lin prophesied mournfully.

"'Lin!" Daisy reproved.

"Well," Kennard defended his depression, "two years is a long time. Most anythin' could happen."

"I've spoke my piece," Herm mentioned with satisfaction. "You an' Daisy can talk it over."

"Yessir. She was goin' to ride as far north as the nigh side o' the Strip with me. We'll make a decision."

Varney was moved to utter a protest, but concluded that the rôle of compassionate parent would best serve his purpose. Already one diplomatic stroke promised to rid him of Kennard for a considerable period. Which would mean that young man's extermination as a matrimonial candidate. A little more indulgence would tend to strengthen his position.

"'By, 'Lin, an' good luck," with the mental reservation—"for me." He extended a hand which 'Lin took gratefully. "I sort o' feel as if y'u wasn't a Rafter A waddie any more. Go to Colorado——"

"Yessir. I might do just that."

'Lin clanked from the room in the wake of Daisy and mounted his horse which was waiting with trailing reins between house and corral.

Varney watched the pair as they rode up the long grassy slope, past corrals, barns and haystacks.

"Maw!" he called to his wife who was now bustling around with great animation in the next room.

Mrs. Varney appeared. There was a certain youthfulness and buoyancy about her that comes only to women much loved and protected against the drudgery which frequently makes ranchers' wives old before their time. "What is it, Herm?"

Herm nodded toward Daisy and Kennard. "I think I've sort o' handled that case," he opined, puffing contentedly at his pipe.

"I heard what was said," Mrs. Varney smiled. "'Lin is talking about going to Colorado."

"Yep, an' I'm a poor manager if Daisy ain't married to Jimmy Younger in the meantime."

"You can't coerce Daisy——"

"Usin' them boardin'-school words on me," protested Varney. "Y'u don't ever get over it, an' I don't s'pose Daisy will, either. I don't more'n half understand 'em."

"Any more than you can be coerced."

"I can be co-worst quicker'n I'll fall victim to any o' the crude schemes o' Sid Hopewell as presented by 'Lin Kennard. I'll tell a man! 'Lin proposes that Hopewell an' me hold a joint round-up this fall to sort o' patch up the animosity that's kep' us on separate ranges since—the bust-up. An' when I called his attention to the fact that such a joint rodeo was in no wise feasible or necessary, on account o' the Strip keepin' stock to their proper range, he had the gall to suggest that Sid an' me put down a joint well in the Strip so that we'd *have* to gather cattle together," Varney sputtered.

"What's the matter with that?" his wife wanted to know. "If you regard 'Lin as an official spokesman for Sid, doesn't that sound like a gesture of peace? Sid's married now—after all these years—and—and—it's possible that he wants to be friends again. That old quarrel over me was so silly, and led to so many complications."

Herm's memory, despite his stubborn will, roamed back to the time when the Varney & Hopewell Cattle Company was a factor to be reckoned with on the old cattle trails to Abilene and Dodge City, and the friendship of the partners was something to be talked about when men gathered at chuck wagons in idle hours.

Herm had long since steeled himself against the sentiment of the olden, golden days—or tried to do so by submerging them in recollection of the bitter era that followed. The rivalry for Ann Gydel—daughter of a Santa Fé merchant—with its consummation in victory for Herm while Hopewell was away on a cattle-buying trip, the accusation of unfairness in the game of love, the quarrels that ensued, the disputes over business deals which ended by Varney buying out his partner, and a development by Hopewell of the north range, divorced from his former range by the now famous N'agua, originally "No agua"—no water—strip of desert which was agreed upon as a barrier against even the occasional business intercourse of joint spring and fall round-ups.

Cattle could not traverse the waterless stretch with safety or comfort. Bleaching bones of fallen stock on the Strip testified to the efficiency of the arrangement; and the few, daring, hardy animals who made it through to hostile domain were promptly beefed, as soon as they were in condition to eat.

"I know that ol' weasel, Sid Hopewell," Varney thundered. "He'd like to wedge in south o' the Strip. He married a rich widow who could finance him in buyin' me out if he got a foothold on Y. B. range an' made things so miserable that I'd have to sell whether I wanted to or not. That ol' fox wants to expand. He'd be willin', I'll gamble, to *sell* that new stepdaughter o' his to Harry, because he knew that Sunset would go to Harry when he married. But I've settled that by tellin' Harry that he's disinherited if he hooks up with this——"

"Her name is Martha, and she's a mighty fine girl. So is her mother," Ann Varney informed him. "You'd know for yourself how splendid she is if you weren't so contrary as to refuse to meet them at dances and sociables and church affairs. I've learned to like them——"

"Y'u've talked to 'em?" Varney was incredulous. "My own wife minglin' with the Hopewells!"

"It's time to call a truce to this crazy feud," she declared stoutly. "We owe it to Harry and Martha—Martha Hopewell, for she's taken Sid's name—if not to common sense. They're entitled to their chance for happiness. This senseless vendetta had reached out and made Daisy and 'Lin its victims, too. Oh, Herm!" she implored, "be—be intelligent."

"You hear to me!" Varney bawled. "Sid Hopewell aimed to horn in on Y. B. range by marryin' off his stepdaughter of less'n a year to Harry, our son, an' gettin' Sunset into his fam'ly. When that fails, on account o' my withdrawin' Sunset as Harry's heritage, then he sends this plausible young scalawag, 'Lin Kennard, who claims to be in love with Daisy an' makes propositions for joint rodeos an' drillin' pardnership wells in the Strip. It's all a part o' his plan for expansion, at my expense. Any fool could see through his designs. If Sid Hopewell is so anxious to get his stepdaughter married off—an' is actin' in good faith, as y'u seem to think—why don't he match her up with 'Lin, 'stead o' projectin' round for an alliance that will give him a holt on Y. B.?"

"Well," Mrs. Varney smiled at Herm with the same demure primness that so frequently reflected itself in Daisy, "why didn't *you* marry some one else than *me?*"

"Because I wanted y'u for sentimental reasons," Varney knocked his pipe out after a vicious draft failed to bring it to life.

"Didn't it occur to you, at the time you were courting me, that it might save a lot of unpleasantness if you'd let Sid marry me?"

"Of all the dam' fool woman ideas!" Herm exploded. "I love y'u," he was careful about the use of the present tense, "an' all hell, high water an' Hopewell couldn't keep y'u from me. Nor can Hopewell take my son, daughter or range away from me now."

"I have an idea," his spouse argued gently, "that youth and love operate a good deal the same now as they did a generation ago; and that 'all hell, high water, Hopewell,' and Herm Varney won't in the long run, affect the destinies of our children very much. You've sent Harry to take permanent charge of Sunset so that he'll be twenty-five miles farther away from Martha, and you've encouraged 'Lin to leave the country—which he may or may not do. But the final issue will be just about the same—in spite of you——"

"Treason!" howled Varney. "Treason is my own house!"

Cowboys, returning from the day's work, heard the bellow half a mile away and instinctively quickened the pace of their mounts, but, hearing no further sound, reined to a sober, saddle gait again.

"Me, I'll play a lone hand to checkmate Sid Hopewell," the master of Y. B. continued in a more subdued voice. "Maybe," he rumbled dramatically, "I'll be underground before Hopewell's plans work out to a logical conclusion. Then y'u can turn the whole layout over to him—for all o' me."

Herm stormed out of the house and greeted his home-coming employees in irascible mood.

"If any o' you buckaroos see 'Lin Kennard ridin' this range anywheres, just set him adrift in the Strip. Don't hurt him *too* much—unless he puts up a fight."

"Why sure, with pleasure," exclaimed "Weary" Walker who had been Daisy's devoted, though hopeless, admirer since she was a gangling hoyden in knee skirts. "I'll try to not make him feel at home till he gets there."

"An', if Harry goes north o' the Strip, I want to know," said Varney, bareheaded, shielding his eyes from the westering sun.

"Depend on me, please do." "Noisy" Christian, unsaddled first because he used lightning cinch buckles, made haste to offer his secret services. "He's forever in the way, at Malindale, when I'm tryin' to get dated up with Martha Hopewell."

"You, Noisy, are you consortin' with that Hopewell outfit?" Herm inquired in warlike tones.

"We ain't had any orders to be unfriendly with pretty, young women,"

Noisy defended himself. "An' Martha ain't—as y'u might say—a flesh-an'-blood Hopewell. I sort o' had hopes of makin' a Christian out o' her."

The stifled laugh evoked by this sally convinced Herm that his orders were not being taken any too seriously.

"Y'u got my permission," he announced sourly.

"But I can't get hers," complained Mr. Christian. "All she says is: 'Here comes Harry,' or 'There *you* go again.'"

Herm strode away, baffled and angry. Neither his son nor daughter showed proper respect for his commands. His wife was openly defying him. His men responded to orders with drolleries instead of patting their firearms fiercely and swearing allegiance to the Cause. There were limits to a man's temper, Herm told himself, and his had about been reached. To-morrow he would go to Sunset and lay down the law to Harry regarding this Hopewell stepdaughter; he would also tell Harry to move the drill rig, per 'Lin's suggestion.

Varney reached Sunset Ranch the next day at noon. Only "Wind" Miller, the gasoline-engine man who had won his nickname through a combination of natural nomenclature and an uncanny influence with cranky windmills, was there to greet him.

"Harry—where's he?" Varney inquired.

"He drove off with the drill rig this mornin'," Miller volunteered. "Yonder," he pointed vaguely toward the northeast. "Y'u can follow his tracks easy from where he hooked on with the team an' loaded up."

"Well, there's a boy after my own heart," Herm applauded. "I came down here to tell him to do just that thing! He don't forget things." Herm beamed. "Harry an' me was talkin', a couple months ago, about plantin' the drill outfit at some place between here an' Red Tanks to warn off pilgrims, but I reckoned it had slipped his mind. I'll overtake him an' see how he's makin' it."

"Better stay for dinner," urged Mr. Miller.

"Nope. I'm on my way."

Varney loped easily in the wake of the lumbering wagon. Within an hour he was riding alongside his son who, perched on the driver's seat, halted the tiring span of bays and dismounted from the conveyance to stretch his long, booted legs and exchange pleasantries with his dad.

"I wouldn't 'a' picked quite this location," the elder Varney commented. "You're—why this draw, here, is within three miles o' Red Tanks. You've come a mile an' a half too far."

"I do b'lieve I have," Harry exclaimed, his berry-brown face assuming anxious lines. "But I was drivin' along, thinkin' about other things, an' sort o' forgot what I was about."

"I hope y'u wasn't thinkin' about the new Mrs. Hopewell's daughter."

"I guess I was." Harry's blue eyes flashed a smile. "Dad—ain't there any way I can get y'ur consent to Martha an' me gettin' spliced?"

"Yep," Herm, squatted on his heels, spoke grimly. "When I adopt 'Lin Kennard's plan for Sid Hopewell an' me to gather stock together, I'll withdraw objections. 'Lin an' Daisy will be married about the same time."

"Is that meant to encourage somebody?" Harry took a seat on his boot heels and gazed levelly at his father.

Herm laughed sarcastically. "When Hopewell an' me bury the hatchet, it'll be in each other's heads. I thought y'u knew a joke when y'u saw it. The only reason I mentioned a Y. B.-Rafter A round-up is on account o' 'Lin's harebrained scheme." He told about it.

"Well, anyhow, if I ever catch y'u on the same cuttin' grounds with Sid Hopewell, I'll sure take it as consent for me an' Martha to get married."

"That's a go!" Herm chuckled. "An' in return I'll require your promise to lay off chargin' this 'ere Martha woman."

"I won't do that," Harry flared back. "An' don't you go to callin' her 'that Martha woman.' She's just a kid, not much older'n Daisy—an' as good a girl. But I will do this," he added, wrinkling his brow in deep thought, "rather'n have a continual ruckus in the fam'ly: I won't write to her, or make dates to meet her in Malindale. Y'u make a promise that y'u don't ever figure on redeemin', while demandin' somethin' that hurts *me* right now."

Father and son shook hands on this compact. There was further discussion and Herm, preparing to leave, admonished:

"Better take this rig over to the base o' that rock dome, a mile or so west an' south; an' we'll go to drillin' some time this summer—or next fall maybe."

Herm Varney, during the ensuing months, played his lone hand with grim satisfaction and enjoyment. The big ranch was often lighted for festival occasions. Parties and dances were the order of the nights during a summer season that was propitious with rain and green grass. The cowboys had little to do. Stock was contented and fat. There was none of the wretched business of "tailing up" weak, starved cows and driving them by painful stages to feeding corrals; no fighting of gasoline engines to force them to pump a maximum of water for thirsty cattle. The windmills functioned ably with favorable breezes. Hence, all cattle country was in a mood for the celebrations at Y. B.—though, of course, Rafter A was not invited to, or among those present when guests convened.

Luck played into Herm Varney's hand. He told himself so often, for the entertainments at the big ranch were bringing results beyond his best hopes. Daisy was pairing off splendidly with Jimmy Younger. This friendship, renewed by contact at Y. B. festivities, developed until there was hardly a day when Herm did not receive reports that Jimmy had ridden down from the Pelicans and met Daisy somewhere in the Flats. 'Lin Kennard was nowhere visible. Daisy said he was headed north when last she saw him, and she hadn't received a letter to indicate his present whereabouts. She was miffed about this, she told her father, but consoled herself in the companionship of Jimmy Younger.

The other angle of the affair which pleased Herm beyond words was Harry's increasing interest in pretty Helen Rutledge, whose father ran cattle in the Pelican Mountains on range adjoining that of Younger. It had been gossiped about that Helen and Jimmy would marry in due time, but Herm's plans called for a different arrangement in order to eliminate 'Lin Kennard and Martha Hopewell. He maneuvered the human pawns adroitly and regarded the issue with pride.

"Y'u see," he boasted to his wife, "it takes the firm, guidin' hand of a diplomatic man to settle the affairs o' young folks. I not only put a stop to Sid Hopewell's plans, but I get Harry an' Daisy paired off with a boy an' a girl that I approve of."

"I hope you're doing right, dear," said Ann Varney, busy with preparations for the evening meal.

"Ain't they happy and contented, so far's any one can see?" her husband urged. "An'," he recalled with much unction, "you said that whatever I did wouldn't interfere very much with our children's destinies."

"So I did," Mrs. Varney brushed him aside as she carried a huge platter of beef into the dining room. "If they marry happily and have families their destinies are fulfilled."

"Can't out-augur a woman," Varney

complained. "She don't know when she's beat."

There came a day in early September, however, when Varney's complaisance was disturbed. In Malindale he met 'Lin Kennard, face to face, on Main street. Both were surprised. 'Lin was the first to recover his poise.

"Why—hello," he grinned.

"I thought you was in Colorado," Varney retorted.

"Well—if I was, haven't I got the right to come back? I knew *you'd* miss me. An' Daisy—how's she? I aim to run down to the ranch an' see her."

"I've given orders to my waddies that they should put y'u adrift in the Strip if y'u showed on Y. B. range."

"O-o-oh! He's rough. 'Wild an' wooly an' full o' fleas; hard to carry below the knees.'" Mr. Kennard rolled a cigarette to quiet his rampant nerves—which were not noticeably affected as he held the oblong of paper for the tobacco he poured into it. "Then maybe I hadn't better pay y'u a visit." He considered this matter a moment and suggested hopefully: "Y'u didn't give any orders that I shouldn't ride out o' the Strip again, did y'u? I might do that an' there'd be no harm done."

Herm controlled his rugged features with distinct effort. 'Lin was forever trying to upset dignity and make somebody laugh.

"You take your chances."

"I'm all upset an' disappointed," 'Lin confided. "I thought you'd likely cool off after a while an' let me see Daisy after so long a time."

This was exactly what Herm did not propose to do. If Daisy and 'Lin should meet after the prolonged separation, Jimmy Younger's effective work might easily be nullified.

"She wouldn't be int'rested in seein' y'u nohow," Varney informed him cheerily. "Her an' Jimmy Younger are hittin' it off in good style."

Kennard's face grew long and solemn. Anxiety shone from his deep-set eyes, but he remarked quietly: "I haven't been in town long enough to hear about it. Well, so long. You give Daisy my love—won't y'u? An' tell her the reason for my not callin' around."

The young man took his departure while Varney sputtered over the message to Daisy.

Herm, his business in town being concluded, mounted his horse and, as he did so, noted that 'Lin was lounging against a lamp-post at the corner.

"Now this ain't right—a-tall," Varney muttered. "In fact, it's all wrong. That ain't like 'Lin Kennard the least bit. He takes a blow like that standin' up an' with almost no comeback. I didn't have no idea but what he'd come down to Y. B. big as life an' whip half my crew if they got in his way. But when I told him about Daisy an' Jimmy he—he—— He'll bear watchin'."

Varney rode to the outskirts of town, beyond the range of vision of the watchful 'Lin, and turned back by a circuitous route. At a point of vantage he failed to locate 'Lin, but he was rewarded in his cunning by seeing a vivacious girl, whom he recognized as Martha Hopewell, trip buoyantly out of Flynn's mercantile store, enter a buckboard and drive away, north, in the direction of Hopewell headquarters ranch. This, in itself, meant little or nothing except that Herm, following his hunch and the vehicle, saw 'Lin ride out from behind a big boulder, half a mile from Malindale, dismount and seat himself familiarly alongside Martha in the buckboard, leading his horse when the girl drove on into the foothills.

Herm followed further, several miles, he judged, and observed 'Lin getting out of the buckboard.

"H'm!" the Y. B. owner communed with himself. "No spoonin' or undue familiarity, but this undoubtedly explains why 'Lin wasn't so keen to see

Daisy. Yessir! He figures that he did his duty by Hopewell in tryin' to marry Daisy an' give his boss a toehold on Y. B. range. Now he's buildin' his stack at the heiress to Rafter A. H'm! H'm! Got his number fin'ly. Fortune hunter! This'll be somethin' to tell Daisy when she gets to moonin' about her absent sweeetheart not writin'."

He left surreptitiously, for he didn't want to be caught spying, and 'Lin was coming down the road at an easy gallop.

That night he found opportunity to mention the incident casually to Mrs. Varney after Daisy had gone to bed. He talked in a tone of voice that would at once be conversational and, at the same time, carry to Daisy's ears. When he had completed the recital he heard muffled noises—like sobs—in the adjoining room.

"You better go in an' sort o' console her," Herm advised, "in case she was listenin' to what I said. I didn't s'pose she'd care—her bein' so thick with Jimmy Younger."

Mrs. Varney made the tour of investigation and, through the opened door, Herm caught the unmistakable sounds of hysteria—pitiful, stifled little cries and long peals of unnatural laughter. They made Herm uneasy, almost panicky. Such a breakdown on the part of his well-poised, self-contained Daisy was unbelievable.

"Anythin' I can do?" He poked his head inside the door.

"You go away!" Daisy wailed. "My heart is broken!"

"Why—why—honey," Herm protested. "It's a heap better to know. I should think y'u'd be glad to know about that scoundrel now—with Jimmy—an' all——"

"Leave us alone. I'll get her quiet after a while." Mrs. Varney shut the door in his face.

Herm did not sleep well. He thought he had not slept at all, but he must have, for when his wife roused him at breakfast time, Daisy had already gone riding. Herm would have heard her leave the house if he had been awake.

He saddled and rode aimlessly in an effort to find Daisy. If he had broken her heart, he wanted to mend it somehow. He had no doubt that he would be able to prevail on her to acccept the sensible view of the matter. Her pride was hurt, that was all. But unless she had a wise and forceful father to point out this fact, she might go on grieving indefinitely.

Herm's tawny mustache ends bristled fiercely. He wished that he had not warned Kennard away from Y. B. range, and that the young man might come riding across the flats not suspecting that his perfidy had been discovered. Herm would throw the youthful adventurer into a bed of cactus and let him suffer.

But Herm, in warlike mood, did not meet Kennard. Instead, Noisy Christian spied him from afar and joined him. Herm was in no mood for Noisy's line of chatter, but he came to agitated attention when the cowboy asked:

"Whatever come o' y'ur well drill? Harry took it out about halfway between Sunset an' Red Tanks a few months ago, but it's gone now."

"Gone?" Herm put a rising inflection on the last half of the word. "Gone? Why, Harry never said a word about it's bein' gone."

"It might be that Harry thinks it's still there," the astute Mr. Christian suggested, gnawing meditatively at a plug of tobacco. "No tellin'. I judged that the outfit had been moved by your orders an' I was sort o' curious to know if y'u planned on developin' another water somewhere, though I couldn't see where y'u'd want to drill, except between Sunset an' Red Tanks, unless it'd be in the N'agua Strip——"

"Don't be any more of a fool than the Lord made y'u!" Herm blared. "Y'u

know the Strip ain't for development. Nature made it impossible, for one thing, an', for another, Sid Hopewell an' me have our agreement——"

"Well——" Noisy was disposed to discuss the mysterious, disappearing drill rig further, but Herm was gone, his horse's galloping hoofs tearing out great chunks of bunch grass.

The cattleman's first impulse was to seek Harry at Sunset; but second consideration led him to the rock dome where he had ordered the drill rig to be planted.

He found no evidence on the sandstone-and-boulder-strewn terrain to indicate that the well-boring equipment had ever been there. Wind and rain had been in league with the marauder, evidently. His best efforts at trailing brought him only to the conclusion that the well derrick had been stolen months ago.

Then he cut sign on the north slope of the dome and there found, not the trail of a heavily laden wagon, but profuse, recent tracks of driven cattle! The hoof imprints of a lone horse proved, to his trained eyes, that the stock had been urged and guided in a northerly direction toward the N'agua Strip.

Herm forced his mind to calm consideration. In the back of his head had been growing a suspicion that the unheralded return of 'Lin Kennard and the disappearancce of the well outfit were not entirely unconnected events. But his property had been stolen months before, which seemed, quite definitely, to let Mr. Kennard out of the enigma. Besides, Harry would have noted and reported the loss long before this time if he had not had a hand in the moving process. Harry undoubtedly had transported the layout to some place of his own choosing and then forgotten to tell his dad about it. Perhaps Harry had not brought the drill rig from the sand draw! Thus reasoned Varney.

But those cattle tracks, now, were something to engage his immediate attention. There was no occasion to work, drive or disturb the live stock on that or any other part of the range. Cattle knew where to graze; there was plenty of grass for them; and they could get to their most convenient watering places when they were thirsty. Why should some one be heading them toward the Strip? The obvious answer suggested itself. They were being rustled! By whom! By 'Lin Kennard, of course!

This evidence dovetailed with the surprise encounter in Malindale yesterday. The sly hypocrite, Kennard, had thought he'd slip into town, meet Martha Hopewell, send a message to her father that there would be another consignment of stolen cattle to be delivered at the north border of the Strip, and get away without exciting comment. 'Lin hadn't had any intention of coming to Y. B. to see Daisy! He had just used that alibi because he had to explain his presence somehow.

Likely—and this bit of deduction fittingly concluded the evidence against Kennard—the present theft was calculated by Hopewell and his employée to be the last of a series. Hence it wouldn't make any difference if 'Lin's visit to Malindale should be reported to Varney at some later date. The robber transaction would be completed and Herm would be out his cattle and have nothing on which to base legal charges of theft. Probably Kennard had never been to Colorado, but had been stealing Y. B. blind during his months of apparent absence!

Herm took to the trail—which was an eighth of a mile broad and as easily followed as the Lincoln Highway—with the singleness of purpose manifested by a cow pony in the cutting herd. En route, he took the pistol from his hip holster and examined the shells in the cylinder.

At the edge of the Strip where the

prairie dipped into a dry, gravelly cut, he checked his mount and proceeded more slowly to reassure himself that he was not riding into a trap. But nothing was visible except the gray and green of plains landscape, relieved by dips, swales and rolling hills of mesquite, cactus, bear grass or sagebrush.

The country became rougher, though curly grama grass and green succulent tobosa abounded everywhere. The stolen herd gazed as it traveled, Herm observed, and there was no sign of haste in its leisurely progress. A cool customer, this 'Lin Kennard. He took his time to a job. Must have started the drive about midnight so that there would be no need to hurry.

Herm quickened the gait of his steed by a light application of the spurs. The herd and the rustler were still miles ahead of him—and he might never have known of the raid if it hadn't been for the chance remark of Noisy Christian about the missing drill rig! On such haphazard circumstance does destiny depend! And the chance meeting with Kennard of the day before revealed the identity of the rustler!

Herm seethed. That plausible young scoundrel 'Lin Kennard had used Daisy as a tool, had broken her heart, and then stolen Y. B. cattle to climax it all.

With these thoughts in his mind, Herm loped through a broad, sandy defile flanked on either side by giant growths of mesquite. His horse shied violently when, on the right came the crisp command:

"Grab leather! Keep y'ur hands on the saddle!"

Herm, aflame with rage, obeyed, reining his pony to a halt. He was not surprised, after the preliminary warning, to see 'Lin Kennard slithering through the mesquite brush, gun poised, toward him. But he was chagrined and humiliated.

"Y'u must 'a' thought I was a plum' mallet head—to not be watchin' my back trail," 'Lin complained while relieving Varney of his hardware. "He has a pistol, too, or he did have. He might 'a' hurt somebody. Just keep on followin' the herd. I'll be with y'u in a jiffy."

"I won't!" Herm raved. "I'm a free agent. I'll go where I want!"

"Why, all right," agreed Mr. Kennard in surprise. "I though y'u was pursuin' y'ur cows an' wanted to overtake 'em. Go on back home if that's y'ur inclination. Don't let me interfere."

"Y'u confess y'ur guilt?" yelled Herm as Kennard mounted his horse which was placidly cropping grass near the mesquite thicket.

"Did I confess somethin'? I didn't mean to." 'Lin rode slightly to the rear and at one side of his unwilling companion who continued down the arroyo despite assertions that he would not do so.

"Shameless!" Herm screeched, his voice breaking under stress of temper. "After eatin' my grub an' chargin' my daughter—y'u do this! I treat y'u like a white man an' get deceived an' robbed."

"Y'u didn't deceive *me* much," Kennard replied, lighting a ready-made cigarette. "But y'u robbed me of my chance to marry Daisy in a honest an' respectable manner."

"Y'u get over y'ur love affairs in a hurry," Varney jeered. "I saw y'u with Hopewell's stepdaughter yest'day."

"So I understand," 'Lin's face was impassive. "I hear it had quite an effect on Daisy."

"How'd you know?" Herm inquired, bewildered. He had met many rustlers, but none like this one whose unruffled nonchalance passed belief.

"Me? I'm a smart young feller," Kennard was modest. "I know a lot o' things that you don't. Now there"—he changed his subject as the landscape altered when they emerged onto a plateau—"are y'ur cows. Go an' get 'em!"

Herm was quite certain that he would awaken from this quaint nightmare almost any minute. Yet there was plenty of realism. There were several hundred cattle on the grassy plain. Two horsemen were standing at the edge of the herd and, as Herm drew closer he recognized them. He had been speechless as a result of 'Lin's remarkable conduct, wanting to "savvy the lay" more thoroughly—and be sure that he was awake—before he translated his thoughts into words, but now he was thunderstruck.

The horsemen were Sid Hopewell and —Harry!

"Why, damn yore crazy heart, Sid Hopewell!" Herm, outraged and beside himself with fury, swore. "What's the game? Did y'u have me brought here to show me that my son is hand in glove with y'ur nefarious projects?"

"Easy now! Easy now!" Kennan rode between the furious cattlemen, for Hopewell, his lean figure tense and his smooth, weathered face red, was in a frenzy equal to Varney's.

"'Hand in glove with me!' You thievin' coyote! After I catch him red handed, drivin' off a whole herd o' Rafter A cows!" Hopewell roared.

"He don't seem to be under restraint," Herm bawled. "Harry, tell that ol' hellion that he's a cockeyed liar."

"Oh, that's all right," 'Lin reassured the irate Y. B. owner. "I told Harry to do it."

"Told him to—— Why, hell's bells an' petrified horn' toads——"

"Nothin' to get excited over." Harry grinned easily and crooked a lanky leg around the saddle horn. "Just ride into the herd an' go to cuttin'. 'Lin an' me'll hold the cut an' then we'll be sittin' pretty."

Amazement held the belligerent feudists silent. This was an enormous morsel to digest. 'Lin and Harry were insisting that Sid Hopewell and Herm Varney ride into a herd together and cut their brands. During the silence, a popping noise—which had been inaudible during the heat of conversation—came clearly, but irregularly, to their ears.

"What's that?" demanded Herm. "A gas engine?"

"Uh-huh," Harry responded indifferently. "Wind Miller's tinkerin' it."

"Y'u got water here?"

"Oh, sure. Two nice wells. One just over the rise, at a hundred an' ninety feet; an' another, six miles east, over towards the Pelicans, at a hundred an' forty. 'Lin's a boss water witch. We got us a pair o' top ranches, houses built 'n' everythin'."

"In this—N'agua Strip?" Herm gasped.

"Where else?" There was a sort of tired patience in 'Lin's query. "Don't y'u hear the engine? Y'u don't think we'd bring cattle out here if we couldn't water 'em for a spell, do y'u? You said 'Drill an' be damned!' So I drilled —an' you damned me a while ago. We thought that you gents," he spoke to both cattlemen impartially, "would like to see the layouts—so we arranged to get y'u here, unbeknown to each other, on the cuttin' grounds."

"An' you promised me that any time I caught you an' Sid Hopewell workin' stock together, it would be a sign that I had y'ur consent to Marry Martha," Harry challenged his father, adding: "It ain't just apparent how yo're goin' to separate this mixed herd without y'u work it y'urselves."

Hopewell's saturnine jaw relaxed. The corners of his mouth sagged. "I made a promise to 'Lin somethin' like that—about Daisy."

"Then 'Lin's chargin' around with Daisy wasn't a part o' your conspiracy to horn in on Y. B. range?" Herm put the question incredulously.

"How would that give me any more holt on Y. B. than it'd give you on Rafter A, you ol' lobo?" Hopewell de-

manded. "He's my son since I married his mother, same as Martha's my daughter." Then, seeing Herm's expression of astonishment: "Didn't y'u know that?"

"No, I didn't mention the relationship," 'Lin murmured. "Seein' the didoes that Herm cut over Harry's an' Martha's case, an' how he fought his head over my just merely bein' a Rafter A waddie, I didn't think it was—advisable—for me to claim Sid Hopewell as my stepdaddy."

"An' Martha is y'ur sister, 'Lin? She——" Herm tried to find words that would verify a suspicion rather than ask a question.

"Beyond a doubt. For quite a number of years," 'Lin assured him. "An' Daisy—she lik' to laughed herself to death last night when y'u told about seein' Martha an' me in Malindale. It *was* funny," he chuckled, "after all the plannin' we'd done for months; an' this Strip havin' been the meetin' place for Jimmy Younger and Helen Rutledge—who've been playin' the game with us an' are goin' to be married *pronto*—Martha, Daisy an' Harry an' me—to say nothin' of the understandin' an' friendship that's existed between Mrs. Varney an' my mother—why——"

"I don't know how I'll ever be able to face Ann," Herm groaned. "I—I—— Why, Sid," he turned to his comrade of the cattle trails as naturally as if the quarter century's rift in their friendship had never existed, "I've been runnin' hog-wild with my claims to bein' boss o' the rancho; an' braggin' about how masterful I'd been in handlin' the love affairs of our children—all solemn an' contentedlike—an'——"

"Don't come to me for sympathy," Sid Hopewell lamented. "I got troubles o' my own. Ever since I've been married I've fought this thing tooth an' toenail, tellin' my wife an' Martha an' 'Lin where to head in—an' thinkin' I was gettin' away with it. Listen here——" He got down from his horse creakily and Herm followed suit. They sat on their boot heels, utterly unmindful that their sons were awaiting a momentous decision.

"Well, well," Harry irreverently reminded them of their parental obligations. "'Lin an' me are waitin' for you jaspers to start workin' the herd."

"Don't bother us," protested Hopewell. "We're all agitated over more important matters."

"The womenfolks are waitin' over at the house——"

"Oh, my God! Are they here, too?"

"An' on their way," 'Lin observed complacently as a quartet of feminine riders hove into sight over the hill.

"We ain't even got time to frame alibies for ourselves," Hopewell gasped in a panic. "What'll we do?"

Herm became calm in the crisis. "Boys," said he, "you've got generous daddies-in-law. The stock you've—uh—rustled is yours for a weddin' present. We'll help y'u to take 'em down an' put on a pardnership brand—or individual brands—eh, Sid?"

"I claim the privelege o' makin' my own terms. You can't give away a couple hundred head o' my cattle without consultin' me," Sid grumbled.

"No time to augur. Looky there! Them women are runnin' a race to see which reaches us first an' tell us what small potatoes we are. If y'u'll agree to what I've just offered 'Lin an' Harry, I'll tell y'u how to handle our wives."

"Done!" Sid sought the way out.

"After close to twenty-five years in double harness," Herm's voice was steady with confidence, "I've learnt that there's only one thing to do in a case like this—when there's no possible chance to augur back or take time to frame excuses. Just say: 'I'm licked'—an' it gives 'em a vict'ry that's as empty as an eggshell with all the innards blowed out. There's nothin' further for 'em to say!"

May the Best Man Win

by Robert Terry Shannon

Author of "The Ordeal of Mr. Kiddle," "White Man," etc.

IT IS DIFFICULT FOR A MAN TO APPEAR AT HIS BEST WHEN SOME ONE HAS STOLEN HIS LAST PAIR OF TROUSERS. YET EVEN THIS HANDICAP COULD NOT DAUNT THE SOUL OF PROFESSOR KIDDLE, UNWILLING ROMEO AND VENDER OF PATENT MEDICINES TO THE BELLIGERENT MOUNTAINEERS. PANSY WAS SOMETHING ELSE AGAIN, THOUGH. . . . . .

FROM her vantage point in a ramshackle buggy on the fringe of the crowd the raw-boned girl in sun bonnet and calico had been watching Professor Joseph J. Kiddle, much as a hawk might watch an unsuspecting chicken.

About the professor there was, indeed, something faintly suggestive of poultry. Perhaps it was his nose, which was rather long, and broad at the tip, that brought to mind a fleeting gooselike impression. Or it may have been that his almost immodest baldness conjured up intangible thoughts of the nakedness that belongs to freshly plucked fowl. Following the line of association—about the chest Professor Kiddle was as puffy as a pouter pigeon, and his lack of stature, coupled with a slight tendency to strut, could easily give rise to the notion that upon proper occasion he might show the mettle of a bantam rooster.

But, be it said, there was nothing at all ridiculous about the professor. Far from it. All day long he had been thrilling and fascinating the hillmen who had driven down from the purple-hazed gaps and ridges for the festivities of first Monday in the county seat.

This, the first Monday of the month, was court day. Disputes over line fences and coon dogs were, in some instances, being settled legally. Already, however, personal justice had been satisfied open-mindedly without the machinery of the law. The dog fights had been up to par, and several fist fights in the dusty courtyard had been all that could be expected. Several of the Henshaw boys and their cousins had filled up on corn liquor and had driven a lesser number of Armsteads out of town by shooting at them.

Gaunt mountain women with innumerable tow-headed progeny and baskets of lunch had been camped all day under trees while their men-folk wandered about and took in the sights.

As the afternoon waned, so also waned the circle that had been gathered all day about the little table sustained by a folding tripod from which Professor Kiddle purveyed his wares. The gleaming yellow skull which, from time to time, he

had held aloft as he lectured fluently upon phrenology and kindred subjects, still aroused a degree of morbid interest but its appeal, like the daylight, had begun to shorten.

"Are you all done, gentlemen?" the professor called out with a note of finality in his voice to the scant audience that remained faithful. "Remembah, gentlemen, this may be my last time in your county for months—even years. Remembah—one bottle of the Infallible Corn Remover—one package of the Magic Glue—one combination lead pencil, penholder and indestructible metal toothpick—all for twenty-five cents—the fourth part of a dollah—the price of a good cigar or a bad drink of whisky——"

The eye of the professor roved the crowd appraisingly and he knew he was through. Business had been bad; there had not been much actual cash in town. Somehow he had not been at his best, and he wondered morosely if the lanky girl in the buggy who had been watching him so steadily might not have jinxed him.

An inward voice warned him that she boded him no good. Even so the barnyard cock must feel toward the aloof hawk floating on idle wing. Opening his suitcase the professor began to pack up as his audience drifted away.

Not so the girl in the buggy. He noticed that her nose seemed unduly prominent for beauty; that her eyebrows were too light for plain visibility and that her mouth possessed a pronounced downward curve. Her gaze never left his face for an instant and as he moved, lugging his case, toward the little single-track railway station she lifted a muscular hand and beckoned. Against his desires Professor Kiddle approached the buggy.

"Git in." She moved over to make room. In speaking she had revealed the fact that she was amply supplied with square, somewhat protruding teeth. "Paw's sick an' he hearn this mawnin' you was to be in town."

It was not the first time in a varied career that the professor had been invited—under the belief that he was a medical man—to attend the ailing.

"I'm sorry, madam," he said, as he removed his broad felt hat with a genteel air, "but I never compete with a local physician. Your own family doctor——"

"Got too loose a tongue in his head," said the girl. "Paw craves a furriner. Git in."

"I'm sorry but I cannot attend him," the professor stated firmly.

The girl opened one hand and exposed a five-dollar bill, which was more money than Kiddle had garnered all day.

"You kin hev all of it fer tendin' him," she said calmly. "Git in."

The professor shook his head and again opened his mouth to voice his refusal as he backed away. He was utterly unprepared for what happened. Swiftly, a powerful hand shot out and, as he ducked instinctively, the long bony fingers fastened themselves in the back of his coat collar. As the professor receded his collar remained stationary until his head began to disappear turtle-like into the folds of the cloth. His hat was in one hand, his suit case in the other. A strict sense of dignity made him immediately cease struggling and he came forward. The clutching fingers dug deeper and got a grasp on his vest and the shirt beneath. Surprising power rested in talon and arm. Professor Kiddle and his baggage was hauled inward and upward with such compelling force that it was easier to yield than to resist.

His face tingled and his chest fluttered, but he still retained his integrity. "Look here, young lady," he protested hotly. "Aside from the incredible bad taste of your actions—if your father is a really sick man——"

"I reckon paw won't *die* ner nothin'

like thet," said the strange young woman, picking up the lines. "You be goin' to git five hull dollars. Ef you try to jump out I'll spring arter you an' ketch you ag'in." To the horse she added, "Git ap!"

The buggy wheels scraped; the decrepit vehicle was moving. The despondent realization that he was kidnaped dawned upon Professor Kiddle. He made a squirming movement preliminary to leaping from the buggy.

With a ready hand the Amazon reached to the top of his head and, with her capacious palm on his scalp, she jammed him firmly down into the seat.

"Am I or am I *not* goin' to hev trouble with you?" she demanded in a thoroughly competent voice. She touched the flanks of the horse with a whip fashioned from the bough of a tree. The animal moved off rapidly.

The advantage of a preconceived plan of action executed as a surprise maneuver lay in the lady's favor. Astonishment, indecision—even panic—made a chaos of Professor Kiddle's mind. In trying to collect his thoughts a brief time elapsed, but it was enough to carry him well beyond the few houses that fringed the tiny town.

Already he was rattling along a stony, rutted road that was growing wilder and more lonely with every stride of the nag. Sumac and elderberry crowded close from either side. The air was sweet with the compounded scent of trees and bushes. The sudden cry of a whippoorwill filled him with a poignant sense of desolation. In such a locale Joseph J. Kiddle had no business whatsoever. Far better had he stuck to street corners in the cities, where the shrill whistle of the traffic cop was ever a comforting reminder of law and order. The buggy jolted precariously along a shelving stretch. The professor looked and, with a shudder, observed that he was above the tops of trees that grew on the steep descent so perilously close at hand.

"I'd like to get out and walk back to town," he said with a meekness that was half a plea. "I—I'm not feeling right well."

His captor leaned back comfortably as the horse slowed and began to pull up a rising piece of road.

"Laws a mercy, mister," she said sociably, "you take on somethin' turrible. Paw didn't make half the fuss—an' his hide's plumb filled up with buckshot, too."

"Buckshot——"

"Yeah—he's bin shot. But I ain't goin' to bother you none with it—yit. I likes fer to admire the scenery, don't you? Thar were a missionary up here once an' she said it were magnificent——"

But Mr. Kiddle was in no mood for mountainous beauty. Purple shadows were blackening and likewise his spirits were passing under a pall. Gradually his chin sank into his collar and his companion, too, gave up talking. Only once did she speak.

"Name's Fukeway—Pansy Fukeway. Paw's named Alf."

The rest was silence until, hours later, they turned into a ragged clearing amid pines and oaks where a log cabin dominated a straggling group of thatched barns, chicken houses and pigpens.

The task that confronted the professor was surgical in its nature. The evidence indicated clearly that Alf Fukeway had been shot as he had been departing from a given spot. As he lay prone and partially disrobed on a handmade bed he explained his predicament.

"I likes to set down considerable an' I cain't do it with no comfort lessen somebody gits them dratted shots out," he said. "Nuther thing, I'm plagued afeerd of blood pizen settin' in."

The professor did not ask how came the myriad of wounds that peppered his patient's back from the shoulders downward. Tactfully, too, the injured man

ignored all explanation. "Got any turpentine?"

"Thar's a bottle in thet closet, doc."

Fortunately, Professor Kiddle carried a small pair of tweezers on his key ring. The work at hand required, mostly, patience. One by one the little pellets of lead were lifted out and deposited neatly on a table beside a kerosene lamp. Into each nesting place the professor poured a few drops of turpentine. In his youth he had been a druggist's clerk and turpentine was the best thing he knew of as a germicide.

"I kin tell thet stuff's doin' the work 'cause it burns like hell," proclaimed Alf Fukeway. "I don't mind the hurtin' but I'm afeerd of blood pizen settin' in."

Professor Kiddle straightened up with a curious feeling of elation at work well done. "You needn't fear infection," he said with a slightly professional tone. "You're thoroughly sterilized."

Alf sat up and peered with his blue eyes through the barricade of white whiskers that protected his hatchet face from winter gales and summer sun. Like Pansy, he was lanky and endowed with a Gibraltar nose.

"Doc," his thin, dry voice quavered, "does it go pretty hard with a man when he's thor'ly sterilized?"

Professor Kiddle rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "That depends," he said at length. "In your case, however, there's no danger."

Alf Fukeway adjusted the hickory shirt and the jeans that constituted his costume.

"All the same, doc," he remarked, "I wisht you'd stay with me fer a few days to make sure."

From a standing posture, the mountaineer tried, tentatively, a sitting one.

"That's better," he said with relief. "Don't hurt hardly a mite. Alla same, doc, you better stay right with me till I'm outer danger. I hearn of folks dyin' from gittin' a sliver in thar fingers—much less a hull load of buckshot——"

"No," said the professor firmly, "I'll have to be driven straight back to town. I'm wanted elsewhere on an important case."

For a moment the eyes of Alf Fukeway danced in angry opposition—then, all at once, they became curiously mild. A closer observer than Joseph J. Kiddle might have detected in them a shadowed shrewdness—a foxlike cunning.

"I reckon Pansy's got supper on the table," he remarked. "Let's set an' eat, doc. I'll bed you down fer the night an' you can git away in the mawnin' if yore still hell-bent to light out."

Morning came and in a little spare room of the cabin Professor Kiddle awakened from a night of solid sleep. The air that swept in continuously from his window had been fragrant and as soothing as an opiate to his nerves.

He had gone to bed with a stomach filled with corn bread, bacon and molasses. He had received his promised fee of five dollars. It was in his wallet in the hip pocket of his trousers. The odor of frying food came temptingly from the kitchen and as he slowly made his toilet Professor Kiddle viewed, not without some pleasure, the prospect before him. The fee had retrieved the bad business of the day before. After a hearty breakfast he would be off with success and prosperity just over the next horizon.

He reached around for his trousers. He looked for them. For a moment he lost patience with himself for his own stupidity in not finding them. His next sensation was one that resembled nausea.

He sprang to the door and pounded on it.

"Mr. Fukeway! Mr. Fukeway!" he shouted. "Oh, Mr.——"

Alf responded in person and came into the room. "My trousers—my pants!" Professor Kiddle cried. "They're gone! Did you see them any place? My *pants!*"

Mr. Fukeway ran his long fingers meditatively through his luxuriant beard and then he stepped to the door, calling out to another part of the cabin.

"Pansy," he called, "hev you seen naught of doc's pants?"

From a rattling of pans the daughter's voice drifted, like doom, back to Joseph Kiddle.

"No, paw, I ain't," she said without great interest. "The last I seed of 'em he had 'em on last night, afore you bedded him down."

About the lips Professor Kiddle had become amazingly ghastly. He sank in the pit of his stomach and quivered throughout his flesh as it was borne upon him that something vital had passed out of his life.

"Those pants," he said hollowly, "were the only pants I had."

Alf Fukeway looked around the room with only the vaguest show of interest and then let his gaze rest on the open window.

"Now, ain't that somethin' *this* world!" he sympathized. "Mebbe some varmint crept in an' carried 'em away."

"I—I'll have to ask you to lend me a pair," said the professor, with whom it had become any port in a storm.

Alf wagged a venerable head regretfully.

"Thet's the worst of it," he said in a sad voice. "The only thing I own in the shape of pants is the pair I got on myself right now. Thar ain't even an overall on the hull place."

Professor Kiddle sank to the edge of the bed. So automatic is habit that even as he sat there in a state of mental paralysis he fumblingly tied his necktie and bent over to tighten a knot in one shoestring.

"You better put on yore coat, anyway," Alf Fukeway suggested. "It ain't much, but it's *somethin'*."

Dumbly, in a dazed trance, the professor complied. Fortunately it was a long-skirted garment—a rather shiny Prince Albert—that reached to a point midway between his waist and his knees.

Beneath its hem there hung an edging of white which marked the nethermost length of the Kiddle athletic underwear. The professor glanced down unhappily. Viewed thus, his knees and shanks presented an unfamiliar strangeness. They had been with him all his life and he had every reason to believe that he was thoroughly acquainted with their every contour. Yet, they might have belonged to a total stranger. The knees seemed lumpy and exotic. The shins appeared unduly bony and lacking in grace. The sensitive pride of Joseph J. Kiddle shrank and sickened at the thought of profane eyes gazing upon a portion of his anatomy which hitherto had been essentially personal.

With the departure of his trousers had gone also every vestige of courage and buoyancy. It was as though the firm rock of civilization had melted under his feet.

"We'll have to send out and buy me a pair right away," he voiced in shaken tones.

"I mout be able to do thet if you'll furnish the cash money—but it's a long drive to town an' besides my old nag seemed kinder lame this mawnin'," his host told him, without enthusiasm.

A new thorn—yea, a new dagger—plunged into the Kiddle breast and twisted itself. His wallet containing his money, he remembered with a pang, had been in the trousers! As a man who knows he is foredoomed to disappointment he searched in the pockets of his coat and vest.

"The money's gone, too!" he said in a sepulchral voice. "Even the five dollars you gave me!" The total sum had not been great but at that moment the professor would have traded it all for the shabbiest pair of masculinity's symbols.

Alf Fukeway toyed with his whiskery adornment, apparently in deep thought.

Finally, "Well, what cain't be cured must be endured," he remarked philosophically. "It's an ill wind thet blows no good. Mebbe it was a possum thet got in an' carried off yore pants to make a nest out of. I reckon you'll jest hev to stay right here with us fer a few days while we look aroun'. Howsomever, it'll be right handy fer to hev you on hand, if blood pizen should set in——"

Professor Kiddle, with misery in his eyes, shook his head. "Man, how can you talk of blood poison at a time like this?" he asked from the depths.

"Talk of it!" cried Alf Fukeway with genuine feeling. "Ain't I the one thet's got to worry 'bout it?"

Even in his perturbed condition Kiddle recognized that the other's fear of blood "pizen" was almost an obsession. "I tell you there's not the slightest danger!" he said sharply.

"Alla same it's a comfort to know thet I got a smart doctor right in the house," Fukeway returned. "If it was to set in I reckon havin' you here'd be jest 'bout as good as bein' in a horspital, wouldn't it?"

"But I'm not going to be here!" Professor Kiddle cried out fervently. "As soon as I can get a pair of trousers I'm going, I tell you!"

Fukeway from a corner of the eye cast a fleeting glance at the bare knees of the savant. Momentarily, there was a running gleam in the look but it died out and the gaze was bland.

"I 'spect you wouldn't want fer to leave the house without yore pants, would you, doc?" he asked innocently. "Why don't you just wait round, cozy an' comfortable right here, an' mebbe in a few days yore pants'll turn up safe an' sound—or somethin'——"

For the first time a cruel suspicion dawned in the mind of the professor. "I believe you took my trousers away yourself!" he cried out suddenly, and bitterly. "You hid 'em to keep me here because you've got a crazy notion that you might get blood poison——"

Alf Fukeway wagged his head reprovingly. "Don't say thet, doc," he complained. "Thet's a mean, low-down suspicion an' it ain't worthy of you."

"But——"

"But nothin', doc! You jest rest yore mind easy an' come on out to breakfast."

Horror widened the eyes of Professor Kiddle. "Without—without——" he gasped.

"I'll get you somethin' to cover you," the hairy mountaineer said quickly. He left the room and when he returned he bore a garment which, at first sight, filled the Kiddle chest with tremulous suspicion.

"It's 'bout the onliest thing I could find," Fukeway apologized. "We be poor folks an' we ain't got many extry clothes."

He shook the thing out, and the worst suspicion of the unhappy guest was confirmed. The material seemed to be worsted and the design was a green-and-brown plaid.

"It's Pansy's best skirt, but she's a free-hearted gal an' she says she won't mind a bit if you be careful of it." Alf Fukeway extended the abhorrent article with a generous hand. "Breakfast's on the table," he added. "Pansy's right smart taller than you be, doc—so you'd better kinda tuck it up round the waist an' it'll do right clever."

"Never!" An evanescent flash of fire lit the dimness of Professor Kiddle's eye.

Fukeway dropped the garment on a chair. "Well, you'll hev to suit yoreself, doc," he said in the tired voice of one not disposed to argument. "Pansy an' me done our best."

Turning his plentifully wounded back he departed the room.

Presently the sound of dishes on the table reached Professor Kiddle and, later, the same dishes being washed. A long forenoon wore away and, lacking

purpose or occupation, the prisoner spent the dragging hours sitting up in bed with a coverlet thrown lightly across his lap.

The noon hour arrived and, once more, there were sounds of a meal in preparation. It was evident that the Fukeways ate regularly and, remembering his supper of the night before, Kiddle judged they ate well. By nature he was entirely unfitted for any art of hunger-striking. To abstain from food requires a peculiar ascetic temperament which some possess and which most do not. Although small in stature, Joseph J. Kiddle had always prided himself upon his appetite and something in the altitude and the keenness of the mountain air now conspired to give him an almost overpowering yearning for food.

For a time all that was Spartan in his nature held firm. Listening attentively, he could hear every soft clink of tableware, and poignantly the odor of victuals came into the room through a crack under the door. Throughout the entire meal did Kiddle hold to his faith and then, most curiously, as the dishes were being cleared away his entire scheme of thought underwent a revolution.

"Why, this is all downright foolishness!" he told himself briskly. "A man must have food if he hopes to sustain his strength. I'm going right out and *eat!*"

Alf Fukeway received him without any apparent surprise and Pansy, hovering over a dishpan, glanced at him incuriously over her shoulder.

"You be careful with thet skirt now, professor," she said calmly. "Better take a hitch in it—she's kinda draggin' some in the back."

A bated desperation was in the professor's eyes. He had passed the time for silly pride. Nevertheless, as he sat down at the table and drew his chair up close to the overhanging turkey-red cloth, there was a rather empty consolation in the idea that, in part at least, his own bizarre appearance was mitigated.

"Jest set the stuff back on the table for the doc, Pansy," Alf remarked from an ancient hickory chair in the corner of the room where he was puffing an after-dinner pipe. "I reckon you'll be wantin' to look at my back ag'in this arternoon, won't you, doc?"

"Yes," said Professor Kiddle grimly. "I'll be wanting to pour more turpentine in the abrasions and if there's anything hotter available I'd like to apply that, too."

Alf Fukeway looked admiringly at his learned guest. "By Jiminy!" he breathed. "You shore do take a hold with interest! I reckon I mighta died if't warn't fer you, doc—specially if I kotched thet pesky blood pizen!"

Pansy came with steaming dishes. The food was simple but nourishing and there was plenty. Once the professor, who had been eating silently, looked up from his plate and detected Pansy gazing upon him thoughtfully. Under more normal circumstances he might have been slightly shocked at the fact that she, like Alf, was smoking a cob pipe.

"I hearn 'bout a man with blood pizen," said Alf, eager to open up a subject of perennial fascination, "thet jest got gradually weaker an' weaker till he warn't able to lift knife to mouth at the table."

Kiddle ignored the feeler. His seared soul had no inclination to pleasantries as he pursued his purely animalistic purpose of dispatching a meal. He glanced up only when a sudden, wordless exclamation came with a tense hissing sound from between Alf's teeth.

"Pansy!" the mountaineer said sharply, "han' me 'Old Betsy'—quick!"

The gawky girl moved with a strange speed to a corner of the room and grasped a long-barreled rifle. It came to Kiddle that this weapon bore the appellation of Old Betsy.

"Who is it, paw?" she said with an odd softness in her voice, as she handed the gun to her father.

"'Gap' Hoskins! An' he's got his Uncle Rumpus with him. Both of 'em carryin' weapons, too!"

Pansy lurked near enough the window to look out across the clearing and at the same time to keep concealed.

"If Gap Hoskins dast come on the place that a way I'll bust him wide open!" Such was the maidenly vow that emanated from Pansy Fukeway.

Professor Kiddle experienced a vibratory qualm and he left off eating. By craning his neck he managed to see from the table the figures of two men at some distance in the clearing. Both were carrying rifles. For a few moments they stood still, apparently in consultation. Then one of them handed his weapon to the other and approached the house unarmed.

A sigh escaped Pansy.

"I didn't want to think it of Gap!" she exclaimed. "This here be all the doin's of his Uncle Rumpus. You'd better let me put Old Betsy up, paw. 'Twouldn't look sociable if you was holdin' her that a way when Gap comes in."

Even though the argument seemed to bear some weight with the elder Fukeway there was, nevertheless, reluctance in the motion with which he returned the rifle to his daughter.

"Jest the same you keep a sharp lookout, Pansy, fer Rumpus," he advised. "If he comes up armed I'll jest be naturally bound to let him hev it—slide or slip, let 'er rip!"

"Now, paw," counseled Pansy, "I don't want you to start shootin' in haste. You jest got to be sensible 'bout sech things."

The decline in Professor Kiddle's appetite was now quite marked. In fact, he had forgotten that such things as food existed.

"I'd better get out!" he remarked.

"That's right, paw," Pansy agreed quickly. "Mout be best to hide him. He mout raise suspicion——"

There was something statesmanlike in the gravity with which Alf Fukeway considered the proposition before he gave his decision. Apparently, the desires of Professor Kiddle weighed not at all in the matter.

"No-o-o," said Alf, "I reckon it mout be best fer him to set whar he be now."

"But, paw," protested Pansy, "what'll you say? Gap'll want to know——"

Alf Fukeway winked a deliberate eye. "You ain't never seed me put up a tree fer the want of a quick answer, hev you, gal?" he remarked with some pride. "You let the professor set right thar an' go on with his eatin'. One way or tother I'll handle Gap all right."

The rapping of Gap Hoskins sounded frank and vigorous on the planked door of the cabin and the owner nodded to his daughter to admit the visitor.

Professor Kiddle's impression was that the young man, on entering the door, had been forced to stoop, but the idea was probably due to a somewhat heated imagination. What was no hallucination, however, was the truly mammoth proportions of Mr. Gap Hoskins. Broad of chest, thick of leg and long of arm, the young man was equally menacing of countenance.

His features, the professor found himself deciding, were not exactly criminal; rather they were bovine. Broad between the eyes, there seemed to be perpetually upon his face the expression which might have found its counterpart upon the visage of a peevish bull.

"Arternoon, Gap!" said Paw Fukeway with nonchalant amiability.

The stolid eyes of Gap Hoskins drifted to Professor Kiddle and rested there speculatively. "Arternoon," he said briefly, by way of greeting to both Fukeway and his daughter. Pansy appeared to hesitate a moment before returning the salutation.

"How be you to-day, honey?" she asked finally.

Her term of endearment brought instant illumination to Kiddle. These two were sweethearts. His opinion was at once confirmed by Pansy.

"Come here, honey, an' kiss yore little pet," she said commandingly, yet with a threatening note of authority. Gap Hoskins complied, but not with any apparent enthusiasm.

"Meet a friend of ourn, Gap—named Kiddle," old Alf said politely.

"Howdy!" Gap dismissed the stranger quickly. "Uncle Rumpus had his fat pig stole night afore last," he added abruptly.

Paw and Pansy seemed surprised. "Do tell!" they ejaculated together.

"Uncle Rumpus, he shot at whoever got it with a shotgun," Gap went on calmly. "It was too dark to use a rifle. Whoever 'twas carried the pig away squealin', but Uncle Rumpus couldn't foller 'cause he was plumb tight as a tick on white mule."

"I knowed he was tight," Alf Fukeway said innocently. "I helped git him home."

"Thet's whut Uncle Rumpus said," Gap replied casually. "He shore was settin' great store by thet pig, too, an' he feels pritty mean 'bout hevin' it stole."

"Won't you set, Gap?" Pansy asked.

"No, I reckon not. Rumpus, he's jest out walkin' round an' he's waitin' fer me. Thank you, ma'am, I reckon I won't set."

The eyes of Pansy flashed with a sudden dominating fire and her voice snapped like a steel trap.

"You set!"

Gap sat. "B'lieve I will, Pansy," he said, with just a tinge of misery in his voice. "Uncle Rumpus 'lowed you-all might hev seen somethin' of his pig if it hed strayed."

"Ain't seen hide ner hair of ary strange pig," Alf Fukeway told him.

"Rumpus"—Gap Hoskins hesitated for the fraction of a second—"Uncle Gap, he fancied mebbe he saw some smoke 'bout daybreak this mawnin' over this a way. Seems like yore big kettle's swung up back of the house, Alf. Uncle Gap, he 'lowed you mout be butcherin' an' scaldin' somethin' this mawnin'."

Tense silence for a moment in the room, relieved by the lazy, drawling tones of Alf Fukeway.

"Yeah, me 'n' Pansy got up at the crack of dawn an' butchered one of our shoats—one I'd been fattin' up myself," he said. "We was gittin' short of hog meat so we butchered early. The meat's hangin' up in the smokehouse now. I hope yore Uncle Rumpus don't think I stole his pig, Gap?"

"He ain't never said he did," Gap Hoskins answered politely. Once more his eyes came back to Professor Kiddle who had not risen from the table. As long as he remained seated and the upper part only of his body was visible he appeared to be fully clad.

"You some kind of a doctor, ain't you, stranger?" Gap asked.

Professor Kiddle assented with a nod.

"I seed you down in town yistiday," Gap remarked. "I reckon you find a good many folks up this a way what need a doctor. People what be sick an' happen to git shot—an' sech?"

Professor Kiddle permitted himself to steal a furtive glance at Alf Fukeway. A cold glint in the other's gaze warned him to discretion. Ever so slightly, Alf Fukeway was wagging his head in a negative manner which Kiddle interpreted as a signal. For a moment he was tempted to tell the truth, but the chill in the Fukeway eye gleamed like a danger beacon.

"No," he replied to Gap, with an uneasy tremor, "I'm not attending any patients up this way."

"Then what you doin' here?" asked Gap Hoskins frankly.

It was Alf Fukeway, with a smile of low cunning faintly discernible behind his barricate of whiskers, who eased the tension that, for a moment, had produced a terrible silence in the room.

"Why, Gap," he said, with a hint of banter, "ain't the answer to thet question plain afore you?"

"It shore ain't," Gap said dully.

"Trouble with you young fellers," Alf rallied, "is thet you think a gal ain't got eyes fer nobody else. How'd you know but what Pansy was interduced to a new beau down in town yistiday an' thet she brung him home fer a few days' visitin'?"

Professor Kiddle's heart almost stopped. In a less dangerous moment the monstrosity of the suggestion would have appalled him. Now it was a sense of personal peril from the hands of an irate lover that send the blood coursing through his veins.

By a supreme effort he brought himself to look at Gap Hoskins. The result was somewhat mystifying. Was it possible that there was on the ferocious countenance of the mountain swain a look that bespoke relief, rather than jealous rage?

"Is thet true, Pansy?" Gap asked in a voice that betrayed nothing.

"'Tain't!" the girl breathed fiercely.

Alf Fukeway waggled a playful finger at his child. "Gals will be gals!" he chided. "An' Pansy's a downright rogue!"

The stature of Gap Hoskins seemed to grow visibly as he straightened up and got to his feet. His face was an enigma. He moved toward the door and it was plain that he intended to leave without a parting word.

"Gap!" Pansy cried. "Gap—'tain't so!"

Mere words could not arrest his towering exit. Gap Hoskins slammed the door behind him.

"Paw!" Pansy's eyes were pools of fire as she turned on her father. "If you—if Gap ever *tries* to break his solemn vow——"

"Don't be a fool," Alf told her calmly. "You've got him more sartain than ever afore," he said wisely. "Gap's too skeered of you."

While they battled with one another with the eyes rather than words, Professor Joseph J. Kiddle left the room and retired to his own narrow apartment. From the strife of the world and its pitfalls the tiny room seemed a sanctuary where he might nurse his soul shamed by the lack of trousers.

Only the passage of time and an appetite which, perversely, seemed to be sharper than a serpent's tooth, brought him again into the open when he heard the irresistible sound of supper. The odor of frying meat came to him and he judged, appraisingly, that pork chops must be in the pan. He wondered if those chops might not have recently been the property of one Uncle Rumpus. Professor Kiddle could not understand himself. Surrounded by danger, girded with humiliation, his stomach remained firm and steadfast. A faint glow of hope lit in his heart. There might be, indeed, depths of his character hitherto unplumbed.

He came out boldly and took his place at the table. A truce, it was evident, had been arranged between father and daughter.

"I want my trousers back without any more trouble," Professor Kiddle nerved himself to demand at the conclusion of the meal. "This thing has gone far enough."

It was strange that Alf Fukeway who could think calmly of resorting to Old Betsy against a neighbor, could be so easily stricken with something like an obsession of fear at the thought of the Professor's departure.

"Jest a few days longer!" he said, almost abjectly. "If blood pizen was to set in, an' me alone here with nobody but Pansy——"

His sincerity was too obvious to question. Kiddle glanced at Pansy and it was apparent that she, too, in some degree shared her father's almost superstitious terror of a vague pathological menace.

"I'll tell you what to do," Kiddle said, trying to be at once diplomatic and commanding. "You rub your back with turpentine. "That's all you need." He hesitated and pondered whether it would be safe to attempt a bold bluffing stroke. He decided against it. Shrewdly, he decided that Alf Fukeway might be deadly under certain circumstances. Kiddle had thought of demanding his trousers under the threat of telling the real truth to Gap Hoskins and his Uncle Rumpus. Such a threat might bring Alf to time —and again it might lead to highly undesirable results. Kiddle elected to be suave. "If you can manage to find my trousers I'll promise to send you a whole bottle of patent medicine made especially to stay off blood poisoning," he affirmed.

"You mout fergit it," Alf told him suspiciously. "No, I'd ruther hev you right on han' fer a few days. I was out lookin' fer your pants this arternoon —but I ain't found 'em, yit."

The professor turned hopelessly to Pansy.

Out of a clear sky she voiced a terrifying idea. "In some ways," she said, with her brow scowled thoughtfully, "you mout make a better husband than Gap!"

A faint, inarticulate cry sounded in Professor Kiddle's throat. The world he had known, the dear world of freedom and trousers, seemed a million miles away. He got up from the table with the plaid skirt of Pansy Fukeway flapping about his hapless shins and tottered to the seclusion of the little room that was fast becoming his cell.

But peace and the time necessary to compose his distraught mind—even these were denied the prisoner.

Wham! Boom! Wham! Plunk!

Some terrific bombardment, deafening and startling, roared against the door to the main room of the cabin. The acoustic properties of the room were magnificent. It was as though some gigantic bass drum were being hammered with a massive bludgeon in the hands of a Goliath. As Professor Kiddle rushed out into the main room the inclosed air seemed to be shaking from the force of the cannonade. On the mantle a fancy china cup vibrated in its saucer with a quivering rattle.

The Kiddle face blanched as he saw Alf Fukeway drop an oaken bar across the heavy door and turn to the corner of the room where his rifle rested.

"My goodness! What—what—what——"

Professor Kiddle was troubled to find words to express his inquiry and his throat and mouth were too dry to utter them fluently, even if they had been supplied. Pansy Fukeway, crouching and peering out of a window, waved Kiddle and her father to silence and inaction.

"Thar's 'bout a dozen men outside!" she hissed. "Wait—thar's Gap—hallelujah! it's Gap!—a-throwin' stones!"

"Gap a-throwin' stones!" echoed Alf dazedly. "Why—I reckon he don't mean no harm—not if he ain't shootin'."

Professor Kiddle, with his heart thumping, brought himself to peer cautiously out of the window, on the side farthest from Pansy. One by one, Mr. Gap Hoskins discharged the last of an armful of large stones which he threw with catapultic power.

Having hurled his last missile, the assailant of the Fukeway homestead advanced for a short distance toward the structure—advanced with a peculiar dancelike step that combined the intermittent action of springing into the air and pawing the ground with his feet upon alighting. To give emphasis to his unique behavior he gave vent from time to time to savage bellowing cries—calculated, perhaps, to apprise the in-

mates, if they were still in doubt, that some one was calling upon them.

Behind Gap, at a safe distance, stood a small group of his fellow hillsmen. These, plainly, were spectators, for they made no movement to take part in the demonstration and stood aloof with the expectant attitude of men who were appreciating a stirring spectacle.

Gap's voice, booming emotionally, surged into the cabin with thunderous power.

"Come out, ye furriner!" he roared. "Quit yore skulkin' an' come out like a man! Come out—ye wizen-up, egg-headed varmint! Come out an' fight like a man! Don't hide in thar with the wimmin folks!"

Paw Fukeway put aside Old Betsy.

"I'm right sorry 'bout this, professor," he said mournfully. "I shore wanted fer you to stay round with me fer a few days longer in case I was took down with——"

"He—he means *me!*" Professor Kiddle gasped. "He wants me—to come out and fight—like a man——"

"Gap's a fool!" Pansy said fiercely. "A plumb jealous fool!"

Once more the stentorian howling resumed on the outside.

"Don't try to sneak out the back way!" resumed the awful voice. "I got the back door bein' watched. If you want ter steal my intended bride come out an' fight fer her han'—like a man! Come out an' prove yoreself to me an' Pansy's neighbors!"

To Pansy and her paw, Professor Kiddle turned his colorless features. On his ashen lips—it may have been nervousness—there was twisted a wry, sardonic smile.

"A fat chance I'd have of fighting like a *man*—without my trousers," he said in a throat-tightened voice. "But I don't intend to fight that hulking brute under any circumstances. You got me into this, Fukeway, and you've got to get me out. What shall we do?"

Telepathy still lacks establishment as an exact science, yet on the outside, Gap Hoskins seemed to get wind of what was being said in the cabin.

"Come out an' fight like a man," he repeated with direful insistence. "Come out—or I'll come in an' drag you out, kickin' an' squealin' like a pig. I'll drag you out by one foot. I'll swing you around an' pop yore head off! Are you comin' or hev I got to come an' git you?"

In the rush of his feelings, Professor Kiddle managed to keep his mind fixed on his host's responsibility.

"What shall I do?" he insisted upon knowing.

Alf Fukeway looked first at his daughter. Womanlike, Pansy had retired to a chair in a corner and had thrown her apron over her head. Queer sniffling sounds proved unmistakably that she was weeping.

"What shall you do?" Alf queried, returning his gaze to Kiddle. "Waal, you kin go out an' meet him like he asks, or you kin hev him come in an' drag you out, like he brags on doin'."

Of what stuff are heroes made? What is the mental alchemy that gives strange and unsuspected courage to the gentlest of souls at times of stress? Pride—or, as science suggests, some unwonted activity of the ductless glands? Who knows? Who cares?

"Get me my trousers!" said Professor Kiddle to Alf Fukeway. "I won't be coming back!"

Mr. Fukeway was moved to protest. "Now, lissen, doc——"

But Pansy, rising red-eyed, cut him short. "I'll fetch 'em," she said.

Grim, pallid as a ghost, Professor Joseph J. Kiddle showed himself at the window. Any argument—any appeal—he realized would be futile.

"I'll be with you!" he called in a shrill, unnatural voice.

From their mysterious hiding place his beloved trousers reappeared in the hands of Pansy Fukeway. Silently, he

took them from her. A lump in the hip pocket reminded him, inconsequently, that the villainy of Alf had somehow spared the purse. In a trance-like state, Kiddle opened it and looked. His money was still safe, even the extra five dollars which he had certainly earned as a fee. Professor Kiddle marveled slightly at himself for being able to notice such petty details.

The hateful plaid skirt fell away from him and his homesick legs slid gratefully into their proper habiliments. He wondered if it might not be for the last time.

He even paused for a moment at a piece of cracked mirror to adjust his necktie. Picking up his suit case, which contained little else but his supply of Corn Eradicator and his gleaming property skull, Professor Kiddle walked with a little strut and a little of the old puff about the chest to the embattled door. With his own free hand he threw aside the cross-bar and stepped out to meet his fate in the dusky eve.

The fringe of spectators drew nearer and formed a spaced battle ring in the center of which Gap Hoskins solemnly put down his tattered felt hat and his homespun coat. For his own part, Professor Kiddle merely dropped his suit case. Any other show of preparation would have been mere affectation.

"In case you don't know," stated Gap Hoskins belligerently, "us uns fight fer our lady fair. If you lick me I'll be the best friend you ever had—an' tother way 'bout. Me an' you be goin' to settle this once an' fer all, stranger. Thet's the rule in this neighborhood an' thar's a dozen muskets ready to settle the man thet don't act four-square. Put up yore dukes, stranger, an' may the best man win!"

Gap's explanatory harangue irritated Professor Kiddle exceedingly. If he was due for a beating he preferred it over with as soon as possible. He had no delusions as to the power that was in those maullike fists opposing him. They meant a hospital—or worse.

Gap Hoskins came forward, his arms raised and his face leering grotesquely. Professor Kiddle started to raise a perfunctory guard and then, most unaccountably, he surprised himself.

With all of the force in his right arm he punched Gap Hoskins on his broad nose. Both men stepped apart, one as amazed as the other. Crouching low and circling, Gap advanced again, but more stealthily.

Something in the glowering face again stimulated a long-neglected center in the professor's brain, and he swung an uppercut. There was a roar from the crowd, and a roar from Gap as it struck.

A thrilling, tingling pleasure had crept like a subtle poison into the veins of the apostle of foot comfort. He aimed a right for one of his antagonist's eyes and he chortled with satisfaction as it landed. Gap swung wildly and missed, as the compact left fist of Kiddle hit his other eye.

One—two—three—four times Professor Kiddle landed without a return. Gap apparently lacked all sense of marksmanship in a fist fight. His huge fists swung recklessly past the other's head—almost as though Providence were playing favorites.

Once more, the Kiddle offensive developed its full force. Blow after blow rained on Gap's rugged and swelling brow. Unbelievably, Gap Hoskins was bleeding at the nose, was reeling unsteadily. One of his punches reached Professor Kiddle's chest, but all shock was missing from the blow.

A rare, canny artfulness had now come over the smaller man. He stepped back, squandering no more effort on random blows. He measured his man. He fixed upon a point midway between brow and ear—upon the temple. He let fly with all of the weight of his pouter-pigeon body behind the smash.

Like a felled tree, Gap Hoskins

pitched forward. In falling his long arms entangled Professor Kiddle and pulled him, too, down to earth. As they fell, the puffed lips of the mountain swain were close to the Kiddle ear:

"I let you lick me on purpose," they whispered, "but some day soon I'm goin' to ketch you out an' beat hell outen you. I'd 'a' married Pansy if it hedn't 'a' bin fer her double-edged tongue when she's riled up——"

Professor Kiddle tried to struggle to his feet. He had stood much—but the last wily thrust of Fate had reached his vitals. He thought of himself as the husband of Pansy Fukeway. He thought of the dozen trusty mountain muskets ready to enforce the stern code of chivalry upon a man who had fought for the hand of a lady fair—and won. A paralysis numbed his whole body and most of his mind.

Somehow, he realized that Gap Hoskins was holding his hand; that his antagonist had risen with surprising quickness; had even helped haul up his apparent conqueror. The air was filled with lusty cheering at the sportsmanlike attitude of the rivals standing thus with their right hands clasped in high-principled generosity, the one toward the other.

Gap Hoskins' voice, not altogether joyless, rose above the clamor.

"Pansy Fukeway! Pansy Fukeway!" he called. "Come an' rest yore fair head on the bosom of yore own true love. The best man won an' I craves yore farewell blessin' on my bleedin' heart——"

Gap wiped his bleeding nose and faced the awkward, pale-faced girl who came through the crowd. She came straight to him and put her hand on his shoulder.

"'Tain't no different if he'd 'a' killed you, Gap—yore my own true love fer evermore," she said simply. "Yore poor, sweet, bleedin' face makes me love you only the more——"

Her words were drowned out in the cheers of the spectators. The leaves in the trees trembled and a lark, frightened from a bough overhead, flew to another tree and sang as though its breast would break.

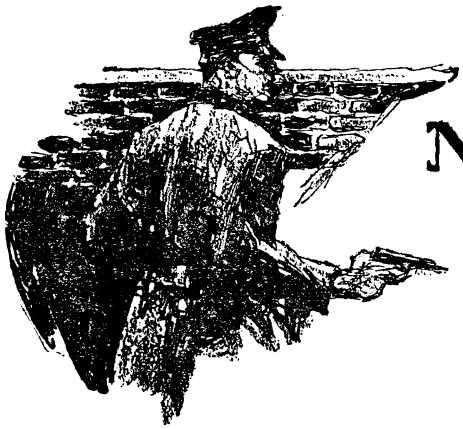
Some one touched Professor Kiddle on his benumbed arm. A stringy man of the hills was speaking.

"'Pears like you lost out, stranger," he was saying. "Lady's choice—no appealin' from thet, you know—with a hull gang of witnesses."

"I want—I want—I want——" Professor Kiddle's incoherence touched the mountaineer.

"Jest bear up as best you kin, stranger," he said kindly. "Come on—I got my buggy here. I'll sot you down ary place you'd like to go."

Professor Kiddle's idea, when he was able to speak, involved an all-night drive, for which he rewarded his driver with a five-dollar bill.



New Buttons

By Julian Kilman

Author of "Dave Lampson's Oyster," "Irishmen All," etc.

WHEN LARRY MULQUEEN JOINED THE POLICE FORCE, HIS FORMER ACQUAINTANCES OF THE WATER FRONT DID THEIR BEST TO MAKE THINGS WARM FOR HIM. BUT IT'S A FOOLHARDY THING TO ANNOY AN IRISH COP WITH A HOT CELTIC TEMPER. . . . . .

LARRY MULQUEEN in his uniform with the auriferous buttons had achieved a fair degree of insouciance as, fresh from a talk with the "Big Un," he made his way along Woodward Street, for his maiden beat in the old Seventh. No one of the multitudes of hurrying pedestrians in the late afternoon of the April day paid the new cop the slightest heed. And Mulqueen, walking slowly along the city's main thoroughfare, had sought to accustom himself at once to the feel of the garment of blue and brass as well as the fact that it was *he* who, in the presence of thousands of citizens, was wearing it. For the stalwart, pink-gilled Larry Mulqueen, ex-water-front habitué, looking as lordly in his official habiliments as the King of Siam, was aware, for the first time in his life, that he had a complex. In fine, he was conscious.

Where Water Street, to avoid the viaduct, takes its oblique slide into Woodward, is the western boundary of the Seventh Precinct. The Seventh, home of the city's original Irish, has spawned politicians as thick as mosquitoes, sons who have gone forth to participate strenuously in affairs of the county, the State and the nation, and been responsible for the coining of the phrase "green sectionalism." Here, Larry, in the rôle of a peace officer, entered upon his new empire. The vicinity was far from strange to him—as a civilian. Having been reared in it he knew it as a gosling knows his own pond. But as an officer, a man commissioned to preserve order among a quick-tempered people, most of whom had known him from childhood—that was, well, whisky of a different blend.

Two blocks of small business fronts in which dressy-windowed pawnshops displayed among other things blackjacks for the burglar trade and competed for predominance with the peculiar open-mouthed shoe stores, Larry progressed while he struggled with his complex and tried for the nonchalance he had successfully affected back on Woodward. Across the street the old ship chandler, standing in his doorway, waved a friendly hand to the new cop. Larry grinned back at the man who frequently had employed him as a lad. Opposite Greek Mike's, a combination pool-and-lunch room, a little farther along, lounged a group of young men—the

slanting-capped, cigarette-smoking breed of mixed racial backgrounds common to city street corners. Larry's glance singled out the slim youth with the black hair and blue eyes of south Ireland. But he said nothing as he passed on.

"Oh, lookit who's here!" caterwauled a voice.

The new cop turned and slowly came back, boiling in spite of himself. Faces of Chinese immobility regarded him.

"Who's the kidder?" he demanded.

In the crowd there wasn't a cheek with a tongue in it. Mulqueen was known to be two-fisted. As he surveyed the loafers it swiftly came over him that this was his virgin test, and the final bit of advice from the Big Un popped into his mind: "Remember, me lad, you can do almost as much wid your lamps as you can wid your nightstick. It's afther bein' a foine weapon, the eye is."

"Move along," he said shortly.

Out of an oasis but a step away from the home of pretty Nan O'Rourke, who now sat on the doorstep viewing the advent of the new cop, an elderly individual staggered. Down at the heels though he was in appearance, his mind soared on the wings of life itself. He roared forth:

"Oh, who threw the overalls in Mrs. Murphy's chowder?
Nobody speaks, though I'm shoutin' all the louder.
'Twas an Irish thrick to do,
I can lick the Mick who threw
The overalls in Mrs. Murphy's chowder."

For the benefit of those who are cold to the melody that carries this spirited Hibernian battle cry, be it known, therefore, that the words "Mrs. Murphy's chowder" are rendered in a veritable bellow. The songster, as yet unaware of the patrolman's presence, had engaged correctly to reproduce the last three lines. He got as far as "Mick who threw" when he lurched against a wall of beef. The wall was Larry Mulqueen. Instantly the song died away. The ancient reveler, getting the upper hand of a hiccup, brought his eyes to Mulqueen.

"Hivins!" he shouted in sudden spleen. "If it ain't that squirt Larry Mulqueen tryin' to arrest Callahan!"

The old man began a series of jaunty capers evidently preliminary to the fact that he intended to fight. Mulqueen put out his hand to steady his maneuvering antagonist.

"Go easy, Tim," he cautioned, "an' I'll take ye home."

A buffet of unexpected vigor was the pugnacious retort. It caught Mulqueen on the side of his head and sent his new visored cap spinning into the gutter. As the patrolman retrieved it, a crowd began to gather. In the doorway of the oasis stood the proprietor, a squatly built, round-headed Italian, and back of him was the slim lad Mulqueen had noted a few minutes before. Glimpsing these details automatically, Larry returned to the inebriate now squared before him with lowered head.

"Come on now, ye old devil," he said grimly, "or I'll run ye in."

Again Callahan struck. But this time Mulqueen caught his hand. The old fellow twisted loose and flung in tooth and nail, fighting with blind viciousness. Forced to extend himself, Mulqueen suddenly locked the man's arms from behind and pulled and hauled him along toward the patrol box on Woodward, with the crowd trailing and hooting at him—his first arrest.

Some half hour later Mulqueen returned and entered the soft drinkery of the Italian. That person was mopping up his bar with a hand towel in the good old-time technique. At sight of the new cop he tooled his handsome mustachies and simulated humor. His eyes, however, were narrowed.

"Hah! Gotta lotsa da brass butt'," he bawled. He thumped his own barrel-like chest. "Biga da guy with da brass butt'! Arresta old Callahan."

Something a thousand years old sang through Mulqueen's veins, and all his rookie training vanished on the instant. He found himself close to the bar confronting the antipathetic countenance of the Italian, and for an instant the two powerful-bodied men held each other's gaze, steel-blue eyes probing snapping black ones and communicating in the age-old language of sudden death. The patrolman's mood passed swiftly.

"I'll say this, Innocenzo—how ever the hell your name's pronounced," Mulqueen snapped his fingers. "If old Tim or any one else gets any more hooch out of this dump while I'm on the beat, I'm goin' to pinch you. See?"

A stream of Italian words shot at Mulqueen's broad back as he strolled out, making forty holy vows to himself not again to lose his temper.

The glow of late sunshine from over the lake filled Water Street, touching the mean environs for a fleeting moment with the ethereal quality of beauty, and through this, as a modern knight of the Round Table, Mulqueen resumed his way. He had gone but a pace or two when he espied the girl sitting on the iron railing in front of the O'Rourke home with her back toward him and the sun burnishing the wealth of her black hair.

Mulqueen's face was troubled as with head up and chest out he moved along. The girl, who must have had eyes in the back of her head, waited until his intention not to stop became evident. Then she turned.

"It's a fine, struttin' bird you think yourself, to be sure," she announced.

The new cop paused. What was that regulation in the little black book he had conned about ma—maling—malingering while on duty Sure, an' 'twas a har-rd word to apply to a bit of a chat with Nan. Nan's eyes were on him, and as always, ever since he was a lad, they befuddled him, left him cleaved of tongue and bereft of speech despite his best intention. Dimly he became aware that the encounter, second only in importance to the unfortunate affair with Callahan, was being observed by the Celtic élite, who, in shirt sleeves and aprons, were on their porches enjoying the evening air. No drawing-room entrance, no stroll along the Peacock Alley of a grandiose hotel, not even an exit from the salon of a Madame d'Epinay could be more difficult!

"I'm on the beat now," he managed to utter, perfectly aware of the coming attack, "an' I'm goin' to do me duty."

"A fine thing—your duty," Nan flashed at him, "if it causes you to pick on poor old sick Tim." She drew back with an air of scorn. "A great big hulking fellow like you!"

Toward the handsome girl Mulqueen put out a helpless hand. His face showed the hurt of the thrust.

"Ah, Nan," he protested. "'Tis unfair you are."

Her splendid long-fringed eyes for a moment studied the new cop, and penetrating eyes they were, that saw beneath the magnificently garbed exterior and the heavy jaw, the boy look, the very spirit of youth itself not yet fully merged into the man. And there he stood, with guard down, defenseless! If her expression mellowed a bit, it appeared to harden instantly.

"It's the buttons, I've decided," she said judicially. "Time was when he was lucky to have one to hold his panties up—and now——"

"That's a lie!" muttered the harassed Mulqueen. His jaw squared. "I said I'm here to do me duty—and that goes for Jim, too."

Mulqueen started on abruptly. There came the swift skip of feet. The new cop felt a hand on his arm. Curiously anxious the girl confronted him.

"What do you mean about Jim?"

For once in the ascendancy, Mulqueen smiled down into the brilliant face.

"Listen here, Nan," he said slowly.

"A little while back your brother was kiddin' me. He's trainin' with a bad gang, and that means trouble for the O'Rourkes."

As he paced on Mulqueen did not see the varying emotions that betrayed themselves as Nan O'Rourke's gaze followed his stalwart figure.

By six forty the new cop reached Patrol Box 27. This cylindrical affair stood at the corner of Water and Front Streets, a strategic spot. For close by were the tracks of the W. P. & T. Railroad, and the wharves as well, thus affording the police a ready station both for obstreperous vagabonds who arrived in town via the bumpers of freight trains and the seamen off lake craft with a "jack-ashore" attitude toward life in general and a howling thirst in particular.

Larry checked the time by his watch, then unlocked the door of the patrol box, entered, inserted into the signal box the little key that hung by a chain, and pulled down the hook. A drawn-out clicking sound ensued. When this ceased he pressed No. 4 button on the dial, which in the station house, three quarters of a mile away, registered on the box sheet the time, the box number and the patrolman reporting, thus apprising Desk Lieutenant Riordan that Officer Mulqueen was on the job and that all was well for the time being in his portion of the Seventh. Once each hour, at twenty minutes of the hour, untill twelve midnight, he would so have to report.

The routine attended to, Mulqueen came out, feeling more like a real cop than at any previous moment since he had donned his uniform. Dusk had set in, though the spring evening remained mild, and, drawn irresistibly by the habits of life, he strolled over to the wharf.

Presently a flat-bottomed boat, sculled by the single oar of a wooden-legged man in the stern, nosed softly up to the wharf.

"Hello, Sloak," called Mulqueen affably.

"Hello, yerself," was the retort.

The boatman stumped up the stone steps with a pipe clamped between his teeth. His was a venerable figure, like Charon himself, a man to whom life—as could be seen from the lines of the face—had resolved itself into a few definite and immutable formulæ. There was a touch of hostility in his demeanor as he regarded the new cop.

"Phwat's this I hear, Larry," he began gruffly, "makin' a dom fool of yerself the first day!"

Mulqueen went on the defensive.

"Old Tim was ugly, Sloak. I had to do it."

A snort escaped the other.

"There ye go! 'Tis like all the rest ye are. A bit av authority——" But the new cop was moving away. "Eh, Larry, me lad."

The boatman hobbled after Mulqueen and touched his arm.

"Don't be afther gettin' mad at old Peg," he said. "I knowed yer father well, Larry—God rest his soul! Many's the day he an' I spint yankin' whin roots out av the fields in the old country, and 'twas him who first reached me side when I lost the leg, Larry. Now, listen."

From Water Street to Fort, the northern boundary of his beat, Larry Mulqueen, a trifle chastened by the words of his old friend Sloak, pursued his way. His glance, however, was sharp. Viewing each passer-by in the light of a potential breaker of the law, Mulqueen was actually, for the first time, noting the remarkable variety of peoples that now, in that portion of the precinct, was crowding out his own race: negroes, Chinese, Italians and nondescript laborers, they sloughed along intent on their million-and-one projects, and being thus preoccupied unconsciously, as it were,

made way for the majesty of the law. This was evidenced by sliding glances and a barely perceptible change of pace or direction in his presence, a deference that gave to the new cop the feel that he was being accepted. But he desired more. He desired the authentic thrill of contact.

A group of negroes guffawing before Gene's Chili Parlor over the way attracted his attention. Mulqueen stalked over. The men were strange to him.

"Go on," he ordered. "You can't hang around here."

A smothered laugh greeted his command. Mulqueen knew nothing of psychology as such, but he did know that his approach had been faulty. Conceding that they did not know him, his greenness had been, he felt, detected. His quick temper rose. Reaching out he caught one of the negroes.

"You wanta go to the station house?" he demanded truculently.

The negro remained cool.

"Wha' for?"

"For gettin' fresh with an officer."

Suddenly from behind some one struck him on the back of the head. Mulqueen reeled under the blow but instantly straightened. Still hanging onto his prisoner he backed to the adjacent wall. The African golf devotees were at him like flies for an instant, and the patrolman, using his club, hit out promiscuously. Then, as quickly as the row had begun, it ceased. The negroes faded away, all but the man whose collar he still gripped. Mulqueen yanked him up standing and by the light of a window studied the face. Unabashed, the negro was grinning at him.

"I specks yo' don' want to arrest me, Larry," he laughed.

Mulqueen looked his surprise.

"What's your name?"

"George Washington Jefferson. I used to help you pull your single-scull boat out'n de water when you was a-trainin' for de races."

Larry smiled and gave him a push.

"Beat it," he said.

Three blocks farther along the new cop became conscious that some one was following him. He crossed the street; the figure followed. Larry waited. Presently the negro slunk up and rejoined him.

"I'se want to tell yo' something, Larry," he cautioned. "Couldn't yap about it back there—too many people lookin' on."

Mulqueen eyed the negro suspiciously.

"Well, spit it out."

"Yo' had some words with the big dago on Water Street, didn't yo'?"

"Yes. What's it to you?"

"Oh, golly! You gotta lay off'n him."

The new cop felt himself bristling.

"Who says so?"

The negro rolled his eyes.

"Dey all says so, but mos' of all——" He whispered a name and then was gone. Mulqueen caught a glimpse of him as he darted into an adjacent alley. At the moment a large automobile passed slowly along the street. It drew into the curb a bit ahead of the patrolman. When Mulqueen came along a big man stuck his head from the car.

"Evening, Mr. Officer," he said. "Have a cigar?"

His outstretched paw held a weed with a fancy band.

Coolly Mulqueen regarded it.

"I don't smoke," he stated shortly.

"Go on! Stick it in your pocket. Lot more where it comes from."

The new cop reached out, took the cigar and crushed it in his hands.

"Well, well, well!" exclaimed the man in the car smoothly. "Not sociable, eh!"

In a manner entirely leisurely he got out of his automobile. Fully as tall as Mulqueen, but of infinite girth and heaviness of movement, he stood before the new patrolman.

"You're fly, Mulqueen," he said. "And I suppose you gotta get used to them buttons. But I've this to say: If you

fuss any more around Innocenzo's dump on Water Street, I'll break you quicker than you can say Jack Robinson."

Mulqueen edged a bit forward until he was close enough to peer into the fat face.

"Hentzler," he said. "There's an undertaker's establishment in the next block. My tip to you is to fix it up with him, for before the week ends the dago is either goin' to jail or some one will be diggin' his bed with a spade."

Patrolman Mulqueen was still thinking of his conversation wtih Hentzler when he started for the station house at midnight, and he was not entirely satisfied with the part he had played. In fact, the evening had not gone well. "It's me temper," he complained as he came up the steps. "I've got to hold her down." Riordan, the desk lieutenant, gossiping with other members of the incoming platoon, stopped talking when Mulqueen entered.

"Well, how'd ye make out, Mulqueen?" he called.

The new cop was aware that news travels fast and felt that Riordan knew pretty much about what had developed during his trick. Instead of proceeding straight to the locker room, he moved over by the desk.

"Three people this evenin' got fresh with their talk about buttons," he said carefully. "The next one that blats about buttons to me——"

"Well!" The desk lieutenant faced him sharply.

"I'll—I'll——" Larry stumbled, realizing his tone had not been that of a subordinate addressing a superior officer.

"Yes, I guess you will," snapped Riordan. "Now, be off with you and learn to keep your tongue civil and your head cool."

The following night, just after Mulqueen passed the alley beyond Gene's Chili Parlor, a half a brick whizzed through the air, missing his head by inches. The patrolman whirled and ran into the alley. The light was poor but he thought he could see some one ahead, running. The figure slid into the narrow space between two buildings. Mulqueen found that his shoulders touched both brick walls, but he worked his body in sidewise—a close fit—and kept going. He had moved along but a short distance when he had the inspiration to drop. He was not a moment too soon. There came a flash from the other end and a bullet zipped by over his head. Mulqueen found his brain working smoothly, coolly—the sensation he occasionally experienced in the heat of his work with the sculls. He did not reply to the shot though his gun was in hand. In such a place the man shooting from the open end simply couldn't miss.

On hands and knees the new cop crawled until he gained a slight embrasure. This was a door, evidently used by the owner before the opposite structure had been built. It allowed a bare two feet of protection, a snug fit for a man of Mulqueen's build. A few moments of stillness continued. Cautiously, Mulqueen raised his body upright, flattening it into the aperture just as two more shots came.

With his hand behind him he began to pound the door. The hour was late but his thought was that a watchman about the premises might hear him. After five minutes or so he heard some one on the other side of the door. A bolt was being drawn, and an instant later Mulqueen was inside.

A badly frightened youth of eighteen held a lantern.

"I heard the shootin'," he chattered. "Are you hit?"

"No," replied Mulqueen. "Did you see them?"

Past vast piles of boxes and crates the boy led the way toward the front of the building.

"I was watchin' them before you came along," he explained. "There was

four of them. They were hangin' around the alley."

"Do you know 'em?"

The youth hesitated.

"I ain't sure," he mumbled.

Mulqueen took the lantern and extinguished it. Then he grabbed the youth by the collar and shook him.

"Out with it," he ordered.

The two were now in the cooplike office of the warehouse which faced Fort Street. Tall, four-legged stools were ranged along the high desk. From the interior, darker than without, the street was fairly visible.

The boy continued to squirm.

"I think I seen one of them before," he volunteered uneasily. "He's from over on Water Street."

"What's his name?"

"I dunno. He's Irish and I've seen him hangin' around an Italian's place over there."

Mulqueen let himself out of the warehouse. He took another turn through the alley but could see no sign of his recent assailants. Back on the beat he scrutinized the passing automobiles closely, looking for one of the type that had familiarized itself to him when he had talked with Hentzler.

He reached his patrol box at Water and Front and, steady handed, reported in at twenty minutes of ten. The desk lieutenant in the station house, however, did not receive from the new cop any tidings of the episode in the alley.

"I'm makin' this me own affair," grumbled Mulqueen.

In adjusting his coat after returning the key to his pocket he discovered a cut in the blue cloth right over the addomen. A trifle ruefully Mulqueen fingered the place where the bullet had passed, his concern for his uniform crowding out the, in the circumstances, rather natural reflections upon the evanescent character of human existence.

Following along Water Street he presently approached the O'Rourke dwelling. A bit beyond, on the opposite side of the way, a light streamed forth from the soft drinkery of Innocenzo. Mulqueen noted that there were men lounging about the entrance. At the moment he discovered that two persons were sitting on the O'Rourke porch —this, despite the fact that the night was chill. The new cop felt his face flush and had he dared, would have crossed over at once to the other side of the street as he had intended to do in a moment. He was in no mood for contact with Miss Nan. But the sight of a patrolman making diagonally across a street to avoid speech with a chit of a girl was clearly not to be thought of.

"Oh, Larry," sounded her voice.

Mulqueen knew that tone perfectly. Its mellifluous quality whisked him back ten years—to the days of adolescence. And she was never more deadly than when she used that voice.

The new cop paused.

"What's on your mind, Nan?" he said gruffly.

"I want you to come here."

"Do you suppose the city's payin' me to dance to your 'come hither!'"

A silvery laugh greeted this.

"Oh, very well. I'll come down."

She ran down the steps and joined Mulqueen, who was trying to make out the identity of the person left on the porch. His gaze returned to the girl. The faint scent she wore; the delicacy of the lacy stuff about her slender throat thrilled him in spite of himself, and all the old-time yearning returned.

Her voice and manner of approach had prepared him for the badinage in which he always came off second best. Hence he was surprised to detect concern in her face.

Swiftly she herself glanced back at the porch.

"Larry," she said in a low voice. "You haven't got anything on Jim, have you?"

Mulqueen, fingering the bullet hole unobserved in his new coat, replied:

"He's a fresh kid, Nan."

She became impatient.

"He says you're buttin' in too much."

Mulqueen observed from the tail of his eye that the youth on the porch had slipped into the house.

"That's what they all say," he remarked.

"Well!" she flashed. "I'm wondering if it isn't true."

The new cop steadily regarded her.

"Jim better mind his own step," he stated, "instead of complainin' of me."

From across the street sounded the fly-blown voice of Timothy Callahan. He could be seen careering out of the soft drinkery.

"'Twas an Irish thrick to do,
I can lick the mick who threw
The overalls in Mrs. Murphy's chowder."

At the sudden laughter of the girl, Mulqueen reddened. She ran up the steps.

"There's your chance, Brass Buttons," she called back. "Go and arrest old Tim again."

When he left the station house at the end of his trick that night, Mulqueen did not return to his home. Instead, dressed in street clothes, he proceeded to the docks. The night was clear, brilliant with stars. The season's navigation was well started. Across the black waters a long vessel, dowered with the golden grain of the West, snuggled in the lee of a towering elevator to the end that the monster might suck sustenance from the visitor. From lakeward, and exactly reversing the process—a sort of geographical *quid pro quo*—there came the incredible clamor of coal tumbling through the chutes and into the bellies of waiting barges destined west, the deep-throated blast of a tug, and the *chug-chug* of a saucy little packet boat.

With eyes and ears interpreting the environs, and the fishlike smell of water in his nostrils, Larry idled a moment. He clicked his tongue presently as he made out in the murk some slight movement on the surface of the water. The small scow of the old ferryman materialized out of the gloom. Mulqueen went down the steps and leaped nimbly into the square-nosed craft as it touched the wharf. "Peg-leg," with the long oar, growled a low-voiced salute at the new cop. The boat was propelled along the harbor, past huge silent elevators and the jackknife bridge, and into the deepened creek some half mile away. Here were many slips out of which stuck the stern of an occasional deserted ship.

Sitting in the bow, Mulqueen seemed lost in thought, evidently soothed by the nearness of an element he was so familiar with and the slap of it against the bottom of the scow. Fooling around the water was decidedly more near to his natural inclinations than pounding pavement back on Water Street.

Peg-leg allowed the boat to drift to a stop.

Mulqueen stood up. To the right was a long low building with a flaring roof in bad state of repair. The slip had been cut in almost to the adjacent railroad tracks. Softly urged, the scow entered the cut along one edge, with Mulqueen aiding by grasping the piles. Halfway back, Peg-leg called a warning and gave the boat a quick turn. Mulqueen ducked his head and they moved in between two missing piles to the black interior.

Using his flash light, Larry saw the vast expanse of the area covered by the wharf overhead, built on ancient piles, many of them badly rotted. There was a dank smell, and somewhere above he heard the scurry of rats.

"Sit ye down, Larry," said Peg-leg, "an' ye'd better be snappin' off the light."

In the darkness the two talked.

"What's this got to do with Hentzler?" queried Mulqueen.

The old man shifted in his seat.

"It's afther havin' a lot to do with the big bum," he jerked out. "An' the reason I'm bringin' you here is because you're too good a lad to let him get you."

"Guess I can take care of myself," said Mulqueen.

"You'll have plenty of chance to prove that, me boy. Now listen to the ould man. Over there is where Jim O'Rourke keeps his motor boat."

"Has he got a boat?" exclaimed Mulqueen.

"He's only had it a week, Larry—now don't be interruptin'. The boy ain't entirely bad but he's in wid a gang that smells to hiven, an' the chief one av them is the big dago on Water Street. He's gettin' his booze here."

"I see!"

"Oh, ye do! Well, you're a dom' smart felly, Larry Mulqueen. I suppose you could see it just as well back there on your beat as if I hadn't been afther bringin' ye here. I'll just push over and show you the boat where she lays."

The old man shoved the scow along gently.

"I'm thinkin' it'll be about here," he said.

Again Mulqueen flashed his light. They were in a sort of cul-de-sac back of the side or wall of the slip. The place had been cleared by sawing off some of the piles. It was now empty. Rather taken aback, the old man was just moving his scow away, when there came a sound of voices. The two sat silent with their ears sharpened to catch the direction of the sound. It came nearer.

With a muttered caution Mulqueen thrust the scow farther back. They succeeded in lodging it behind a group of piles when a grating sound apprised them that another craft had entered. A flash light went on, and swept the interstices of the place.

"All right," some one exclaimed. "E-a-s-y, there."

Mulqueen knew that voice. It was young O'Rourke's.

The old man touched him on the knee and whispered. They deftly worked their craft in toward land. The piles grew shorter and they were compelled to sit with bent bodies. By this time they were immediately beneath the disused freight shed. Mulqueen explored the flooring overhead. It was moldy and wet to the touch. After a bit he braced one foot on a pile and thrust his shoulder against the spongy flooring. It gave way, and leaving Peg-leg to watch below, the new cop crawled through.

Using his flash light sparingly he made his way toward the front of the structure. Here he found a window and studied the street. He could see no one abroad. A glance at his watch showed the time to be two a. m.

He left the building by a broken window and went cautiously along the front until he reached the corner next the slip. Three men stood but a few steps away. One seemed to be peering in his direction. Mulqueen flattened himself to the wall. He discovered an automobile standing just beyond the tracks.

There was a low-voiced call from the driver. One of the three men walked over, while the other two went down the wharf. After a few minutes, Mulqueen saw them returning. They carried something between them and passed over to the automobile. Then, unexpectedly, there sounded the rumble of an approaching train. This appeared to disconcert them, for the automobile was hurriedly backed away. With a roar the freight train bore down. It was a long one and its passage meant that for a brief time the bootleggers would be cut off from the man in the boat.

Running swiftly, Mulqueen drew near the wharf. He pulled his cap over his eyes and peered down. The motor boat had been moved out from its hiding

place, and standing in it was young Jim O'Rourke.

"All right," called Mulqueen. "Pass me one."

As the youth bent over to pick up a case, Mulqueen dropped on him. There was a grunt of surprise.

"What the hell!"

Mulqueen caught the youth by the neck.

"Clever boy, eh!" he muttered.

"You, Mulqueen!" stuttered the youth.

He grabbed a bottle and swung it at the new cop. It missed and splashed. Their struggle rocked the boat dangerously, but Mulqueen's great strength made the contest short. With the youth down and his head against the gunwale, Mulqueen held him as in a vise.

"All I'm gettin' out of it is pay for my boat," spluttered O'Rourke, "and—and, Larry, I'm sorry I kidded you."

Mulqueen grunted.

"Kiddin' a man by heavin' bricks at him, eh! What about the shootin' back in the alley?"

"Honest, Larry, I didn't do it. It was 'Monk' Larsen. He'll be here in a minute."

Mulqueen hauled the youth upright and shook him.

"Keep your mouth shut an' do as I tell you," he ordered.

He signaled softly to Peg-leg who had nursed the scow into the offing. It bumped the motor boat and the new cop drove the youth in with Peg-leg. As the old man worked his scow into the adjacent darkness a voice from the wharf called:

"Get a move on, there!"

Mulqueen bent down and picked up a case.

"Here," he said. "Grab it."

As the hand was extended Mulqueen caught it. He gave a yank and the owner of the hand hurtled down into the boat swearing terribly. He gripped Mulqueen's legs and nearly toppled him over into the water. The new cop pushed home one to the jaw that left his antagonist limp. Then he bounded to the wharf. Two other men received him ambitiously. A club descended and partially dazed Mulqueen. He went to his knees an instant. One of them got him by the throat. Struggling to his feet by sheer strength, the new cop carried his man with him, using his body as a guard against the vicious blows of the bootlegger with the club. The three fought in a circle until nearing the edge of the wharf once more, Mulqueen, well trained for the work, expertly booted the legs from under the man he held and shot him head first into the water.

The man with the club had drawn away. Mulqueen started for him as another figure loomed up. This apparently was the driver of the automobile. There was something familiar to Mulqueen about the big body as it came straight to grips with him.

"This is my busy night," grunted Mulqueen.

But there were powerful arms about his head. He felt his breath shortening as he pumped home blows to the middle of the girthy body. A sputter of Italian followed the last of these. The two fell apart for an instant.

"Ha! Dis da bigga guy wid da brass butt'," sneered Innocenzo.

Between puffed lips Mulqueen actually laughed.

"You want some more, eh!"

He lurched forward unexpectedly, using his foot. It caught the hand of the Italian and sent the knife he had pulled spinning to the pavement. There was a yell of pain from Innocenzo. It was stopped midway. Mulqueen, launching his blow from a solid shoulder, caught him full on the mouth, and the Italian slumped down.

Dizzy from his exertions, Mulqueen glimpsed the last of his adversaries, flitting to the left of him. He started for the automobile. When only halfway

there, a shot sounded. Something went wrong with Mulqueen. It was curious: he couldn't seem to walk any more.

When Larry regained consciousness, he was lying in a neat bed. There were voices, but they seemed very distant. For a long time he studied over the phenomenon of bare walls and an outlook through a window he had never seen before. Slowly his memory filtered back. He moved his hand along the bedcovers.

At the movement a nurse came over to him.

Larry gazed at her.

"How long have I been here?" he asked.

She smiled with solicitude.

"Since last night," she explained. "You were shot through the shoulder."

Moving slightly, Mulqueen winced with the pain.

Ah, yes, there had been a shot.

"There's an old man who has been waiting outside all day to see you, Mr. Mulqueen," the nurse said. "Would you like to talk to him for a moment or two?"

Larry nodded. Peg-leg stumped in. With an alert gaze he approached the bed. His weathered old face kindled with joy at sight of the patient.

"Ah, Larry, me lad, 'tis a grand fighter ye are. They got the whole gang av thim in jail and the newspapers are runnin' yer picture and callin' ye the 'one-man army.' It's the Irish forninst the wor-rld."

Anxiously Larry glanced about him. He saw the nurse step out.

"An' young Jim, too?" he asked.

Old Peg-leg Sloak winked a shrewd eye.

"Don't speak av it," he whispered. "The boy's afther learnin' his lesson, and what's more, Nan knows it. She's been waitin' outside all day to see you—if ye'll let her come in, Larry."

"Let her come in!" exclaimed Mulqueen.

He half sat up in the bed, but slumped back.

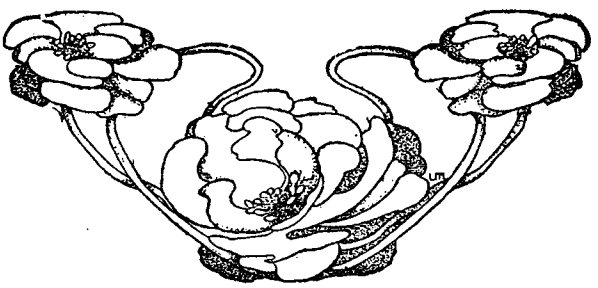
There was a rustle of a dress and Nan O'Rourke entered. For an instant Larry Mulqueen gazed at the vision of Celtic beauty. He saw the girl's lips trembling. He glanced appealingly at old Peg-leg.

"Ah, sure, me lad," mumbled Peg-leg. "Me foot may be made of solid wood, but, begorra, me head ain't."

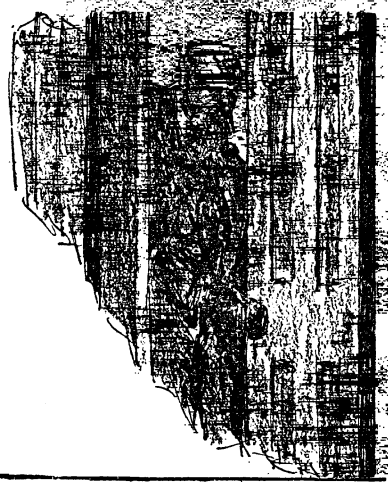
As the door closed after him, Nan O'Rourke sat down on the bed. From his pillow Mulqueen watched her misty eyes for a long minute, seeming to find it difficult to credit what he read in their depths. His hand slid out and covered hers.

"Nan," he whisperd, hoarsly.

Swiftly the girl bent down and kissed the face on the pillow.



The Thinker



by William H. Hamby

Author of
"Gringo Grafters," "The Liar and the Ghost," etc.

"THE THINKER" THEY CALLED PAUL OSBORN AND ALTHOUGH THEY RESPECTED HIS ABSTRACT KNOWLEDGE THEY THOUGHT HIM A CHILD IN PRACTICAL AFFAIRS. BUT KNOWLEDGE IS NOT SUCH A BAD WEAPON TO BE ARMED WITH WHEN A MAN FIGHTS SINGLE HANDED AGAINST NATURE AND THE TRICKINESS OF A ONE-TIME FRIEND. . . . . .

SHEM," Adamson relaxed, reached for the cigarette case, lighted up, and leaned back comfortably in the swivel chair, "I am glad you found him. It is a funny world. Think of Osborn crossing my track again after twenty years! I can see old Paul now, as plain as a sycamore tree by the spring branch. He had wild, ash-colored hair—the color of dead broom grass—deep-set eyes with a sort of film over them, and a knobby, solemn face. He was so awkward he would fall over the township line. The boys would never choose him in a ball game, and the girls used to laugh at him until his face would get as red as a flannel shirt."

"Looks just about the same now, only more so. Nutty geezer all right," commented Gault.

Adamson touched his necktie, and looked slowly about the office—a luxurious office—befitting a two-million-dollar corporation. Some change since those days!

"But old Paul could think," he added reminiscently. "He figured out a reason for everything. None of it any account, of course, but he was always at it. He thought up a theory to explain why the Indians left the Ozarks before the white man came. He worked out a reason for the teacher limping in the left leg. He explained to us boys why ice is thinner in some spots over the creek than others."

"'Do you know,' he asked me once, 'why quails build their nests in wheat fields?'

"'No,' I said; 'fool thing for them to do, anyway.'

"'It's because,' he said, 'they have learned that people do not walk through the wheat, nor turn stock in it—and that it is a good place to hide.'"

Shem puffed a long curl of smoke, and shook his head as though it was beyond him.

"A nut, all right. Think of a fellow using his bean for things like that."

Adamson leaned forward, and made a note on a sheet of the Power Company's heavily embossed paper.

"You can get your check from the cashier in the morning," he said briskly to Gault. "You've done very well."

Two hours later Charles P. Adamson, vice president and general manager of

the Western Power Company took a lower berth in the Owl, which made connections at Los Angeles with the Limited for Kansas City.

This was too important a mission to entrust to a subordinate. He would pay the "Thinker" a visit of friendship. Incidentally, he took along a grant deed with a check mark, showing old Paul where to sign.

He grinned as he switched off the light, and stretched out in the berth. It would be a brand-new experience for old Paul, signing a deed. He never had had anything in his life to sell before—not even a dog.

After a good deal of difficulty Adamson found the address which Gault had given him. It was an old, dingy, dilapidated three-story frame house at the foot of the bluffs near the railroad tracks—a cheap rooming house for section hands and other day laborers.

Osborn's room was on the top floor. He knocked three times without any response, and would have given up if he had not smelled cooking through the cracks in the door. At the fourth knock the door opened grudgingly about two feet, and a thin, bearded man stood blocking it. Physically, the Thinker had changed a good deal, but Adamson would have known him anywhere. His hair had deepened in color. It was a light brown with a bit of red in it. He wore a beard four inches long, and his eyes looked darker and clearer.

"Hello, Paul." Adamson smiled familiarly, while Osborn's brows knitted in an effort at recognition.

"Oh, it's you, is it, Charley?" he said, as impersonally as though he had just found a misplaced ruler. "Come in." He stepped aside and held the door open wider.

The room had a bare pine floor, worn and stained. The unplastered board walls were dingy as a box left out in the rain. There was an unpainted iron bed, a small table, and an oil stove. Tomatoes in a granite pan were stewing on the stove, and a dry loaf of bread lay on a shelf beside a cup and saucer.

It was an awkward meeting. They had all been poor in the hills, but that was the accident of boyhood which ambition levitated. This was a different poverty; the squalor of the city camp follower—the failure of maturity.

Adamson tried to reëstablish the school-day relations; but either the recollections were painful to the Thinker, or else he had no interest in reminiscences. He looked out of the dingy window most of the time, occasionally glancing at the stewing tomatoes. His clothes were perhaps the graduating suit bought twelve years ago. And yet there is something about brains, even when misapplied, that won't be pitied nor patronized. One would as soon have offered charity to an Astorbilt as to Paul Osborn.

"I hear you wrote a wonderful thesis when you took your Ph.D. in the university," Adamson said, "but I never got to read it."

The Thinker went to the box in the corner, lifted the lid and turned over a pile of papers, and brought out a printed copy.

"You can take this," he said with a touch of pride. "It has been translated into five languages."

"Is that so? Think of one of our Oak Grove boys being read in five different countries."

Osborn went to the box, fumbled about again, and brought out two worn magazines of the thick sort that flourished briefly in the days of the *Arena* and *Psychological Magazine*.

"Here's an article I wrote," he laid one of them on Adamson's knee, "on the 'Origin of Thought.' And this," he opened the pages of the other, "is on the 'Drift of Civilization.'

"Both of these were copied in England and France, and the one on Civilization is, I understand, used in the col-

lege text books in the University of Stockholm."

"Are you writing now?" Adamson had been wondering where Osborn got even the tomatoes, and the dry loaf.

"Once in a while the *Star* prints an article exposing some popular fallacy."

"Paul," Adamson put warmth into the tone, "it's good to meet one of our old gang again. You don't know how often I have thought of our happy days in the hills."

"Is that so?" There was no glimmer of interest in his roughly fashioned face. "Did you ever think, Charley, why Rome fell?"

"No," Adamson could not restrain a laugh, "unless it was because something heavier fell on top of it."

The Thinker swept this levity away by a faint shake of the head.

"The moralists will tell you it was because Rome became immoral, but Rome was just as immoral one time as another. The politicians argue it was bad government, and the proletariat think it was because of tyrants."

"But what difference does it make why Rome fell?" Adamson felt of his tie and gave his tailored coat a little pull to keep it from wrinkling on the chair.

"What difference?" Osborn turned with bewildered amazement in his deep-set eyes. "Why the end of all thinking is to get at the truth of things."

"But suppose the thing itself isn't worth an acorn shell—why waste time thinking about it?"

The Thinker gave a little snort at that and waved a thin left hand, dismissing the heresy as unworthy of answer.

"The cause of Rome's fall was this: the men in power were not the men who did the most thinking. When the thinkers and the doers become separated, there is always a crash."

"Not a bad idea at that." The old respect for the Thinker would not down. He might be a miserable failure, he might be starving, but, darn it all, he did have brains!

"Paul," Adamson took out a paper, "I've got news for you. You are an heir. Your Aunt Sarah Freeman is dead, and has left you a tract of land in California."

The Thinker sat staring at the pan on the stove, whether thinking of the tomatoes burning, or of the burning of Rome, Adamson could not tell. But certainly he was not thinking of land in California. C. P. touched his tongue to his lips, felt of his cravat, and spoke again.

"There is, I believe, a hundred and sixty acres of the land she left you."

The Thinker's eyes came around slowly, and looked inquiringly at Adamson.

"When did my Aunt Sarah die? I had not heard."

"About two years ago, I believe. She willed the land to you. It is on Palomar Mountain."

Paul's eyes were fixed on the dingy windows. "Seems odd she could have died and I not know it. She was the only person who ever held me on her lap. When I was a boy I used to imagine"—and he smiled a wan, far-off smile—"that heaven was a place where there were a great many Aunt Sallies with warm, soft laps for small boys crying over stubbed toes."

Adamson had been a very showy boy in school, very handsome, with better clothes and a smoother tongue. But he had not been quick at books. He was not at all a hard thinker. And yet he had a facility of simulating both thought and emotion. He gave over the discussion of the land, and reminisced about Aunt Sally Freeman.

He suggested that Paul should go uptown with him and have dinner. Osborn shook his head, but Adamson insisted.

"Paul, you would not be selfish enough after I have come all this way

to see you to refuse to spend an evening with me? I know a mere, dull business man is a bore to a great scholar like you, but for old times' sake you can stand one evening of it. I've got a lot of things to talk over with you."

The Thinker got up and took his tomatoes off the stove, took down an old black hat from a nail and started for the door.

Adamson took him to the showiest café in the city, but if the Thinker felt the least bit conscious of his shabby suit and the long scraggy hair which came halfway down his thin neck, he gave no sign of it.

He was rather surprised that Paul picked food from the bill with good taste, and ate it with perfect manners. He guessed it was the first complete meal the man had had in months—possibly years.

During the dinner, just when Adamson was wondering how best to attack the question of his land, the Thinker looked up from his plate.

"Where did you say that land is?"

"On Palomar Mountain—not far from San Diego." He was surprised. Osborn had understood about the land after all.

"What sort of land is it?" His brown eyes looked filmy again with far-off thought.

"Wild land—nothing but rocky bluffs—a few scrub pines—and almost impossible to reach. Sorry, old man, but it is not worth much. I think if put up at auction, it would not sell for two hundred dollars."

The Thinker relapsed again, and apparently was considering the probable destiny of Turkey or Turkistan or Afghanistan.

"I'll tell you what," Adamson said, seeing that he must get down to the dotted line, "I've done pretty well, Paul. Am vice president and general manager of a pretty big company. Pull down twenty thousand a year salary aside from my share of the earnings of the company.

"Now, in time, I might get a thousand dollars out of that land. Possibly fifteen hundred. It isn't worth anything to you, and I expect you could use the money.

"For old times' sake I'm going to strain a point and give you fifteen hundred dollars." He took the deed out of one pocket, and a check book out of the other, and reached for his fountain pen. "You know, Paul," he said, with a bit of emotion in his smooth pink face, "I'd do anything for an old friend."

"Thanks, Charley." The Thinker responded without feeling. "I won't take your money for the worthless land. But I'd like to see it. You may lend me a hundred dollars for the trip, if you don't mind."

II.

The Thinker sat with his chair tipped back against a pine tree in front of his tent, reading. His legs were crossed, and his left foot pointed a wrinkled old shoe at the sky at an angle of forty-five degrees. The morning was still, save for that soft murmur of the woods that is better than silence, and the air was pungent with the smell of the warm sun on pine needles.

From the path up the hillside there came the sound of a human voice—a woman's voice—singing. The Thinker turned his head and looked over his left shoulder. He was aware that people lived on the plateau at the top, a quarter of a mile above. He had seen an old man with a scraggy beard and a limp in the left leg, stumping about the place. And a younger man in overalls occasionally passed through the timber leading a harnessed team to water. But this was the first time he had seen a woman on Palomar. She was coming down through the pine woods swinging a basket in her hand, and singing about "The Bonnie Banks of Clyde."

The Thinker was alarmed. She was young, and she seemed headed toward his tent—and she carried a basket! No doubt she was one of those infernal good angels who carry things around in baskets to people who look lonely. He wasn't lonely and he would tell her so quickly. He was having the most blissful time of his life. And he didn't need food. He cared little about food and there was enough in his tent—canned stuff and cheese, raisins and biscuits and bacon—to last him for weeks.

Nothing could be more disturbing to the Thinker than a woman—a young woman with a basket.

Osborn had never been annoyed much by women. When a boy they had laughed at him for his awkwardness, and he had stayed as far away from their ridicule as possible. After he grew up, his poverty, his clothes, and possibly if he had known it, his philosophy had not encouraged pursuit. He had avoided women of all sorts, and few of them had ever resented it.

The girl was headed his way. He resumed his reading and ignored her approach. But he knew when she stopped in front of him, and felt a mingled resentment and embarrassment at her evident scrutiny. She had not spoken, and was apparently waiting for him to look up. His eyes slipping past his book saw her feet and her ankles.

"Well?" Her tone startled him. It was not sharp but it was arresting. He looked up as though just discovering her. She was scrutinizing him with serene gray eyes. The corner of her mouth twitched with humor.

"I beg your pardon." He spoke sarcastically—at least he intended to. "Were you speaking to me?"

"Yes—if you are at home." She was openly smiling now, but not with ridicule. "Do you want to buy some eggs?"

"How much are they?" He had not thought of eggs before, but now he remembered they were easy to cook.

"Forty cents a dozen."

He deliberately brought his chair forward, got up, and went into the tent. In a moment he came back with a tin pan which he held out for the eggs. She counted a dozen.

"And one for good measure," she added. "It is a brown one and they are the best."

He felt in his pocket for the money. There was only a quarter and a nickel. He remembered that was all he had. The old fear of ridicule—of feminine ridicule—possessed him.

"Oh, that is all right." She spoke before he did. "If you haven't the change I'll get it some other time." She had looked away from him. Her profile was quite as attractive as the full view of her face. Her lips were full, her neck soft and smooth. Her body was well fashioned, almost luxuriant in its physical perfection.

"It's a beautiful valley." She was looking over the wild meadow along the streams with its scattering live oak and fringe of pine about the borders. "Campers stray down here once in a while, and we sell them eggs and vegetables."

"They won't stray down here any more." The Thinker felt his first conscious pride in land. "It belongs to me now. I don't want to be disturbed."

"Have I disturbed you?" Her cheeks flamed at the intimation. "I beg your pardon." She turned, and started away with that air of being unjustly offended, which every woman can assume instinctively.

The Thinker had a queer feeling of regret at having offended her.

"Oh, I say," he called. She turned at the top of the knoll, by the big pine. The sun fell on her hair, a rich dark brown. "I think I better give these eggs back to you." He picked up the pan and started toward her.

She looked at him, puzzled, trying to guess what he meant by it.

"You see," he felt the old writhing in the face of ridicule, "that thirty cents is all I have—and I may never have any more."

Her eyelids dropped, a changed expression came into her face. He could not guess what it meant—except it was not ridicule.

"You might keep half a dozen." The tone was casual. "That would be only twenty cents."

"So I might—I had not thought of that."

They divided the eggs, and he gave her a quarter.

"A half a dozen is only twenty cents, and I have no change." Her smile was human and kindly.

"Perhaps you can some time bring me some milk—or potatoes—or something for a nickel."

"All right—I'll think of something."

They stood looking at each other for a moment without speaking. He had two very surprising sensations. One, a feeling of gladness that she had not ridiculed him; the other, a feeling of guilt that his eyes had been secretly, almost fondly appraising her.

"You are going to stay here?" She picked a sliver of bark from the pine tree.

"I don't know. I hadn't thought about it."

She laughed, but the light in her eyes was teasing rather than scornful.

"Well, you better be thinking about it if you intend to stay. It snows sometimes, and the wind will make kite tails of that tent."

She went up the path, and he stood watching with the oddest, strangest feeling. His hand, as he rested it on the tree trunk, shook.

He returned to his chair, picked up the book, opened it, and sat staring at the page several minutes before he discovered it was upside down.

In the afternoon the Thinker lay stretched on the bed of pine needles in the warm sun, thinking about the trees. What a fight they had for thousands of years, to cover the earth and bless it with shade, and shelter and food. They had conquered bareness and steepness, and withstood storm and drought until at last like a green mantle they clothed continents. Then came man, with a greedy little heart and a busy little saw, and the growth of hundreds of years fell like cabbage plants before an army of cut worms. Also, he remembered how she looked standing among the trees up the path there—warmer, more alive, more vivid than the trees themselves. And yet she had only tarried a little while. He wondered what relation the old man was to her—and the younger man who watered the horses. Surely she was not married. And he wondered if she ever thought. He supposed not. Women, so far as he knew, seldom had brains, and rarely used those they had.

He sat up suddenly. The rhythmic explosion of a machine lashed the silence. He saw it coming across the open stretch of valley—his valley. Anger filled him. He went down to the knoll to meet the newcomer and order him out.

"Hello, old man." It was Charley Adamson who got out of the machine, and came toward him with an airy hail-fellowness. "How is the old Thinker working?"

"How do you do?" Osborn nodded without enthusiasm. He wondered what Adamson had come for.

"Is this your land?" Adamson took out a toothpick and bit on it.

"Yes," said Osborn. "The surveyor says one corner is near that big live oak across the creek yonder, another at that dead pine on the hill north and then a half mile down this way. It takes in all this valley, and the pine woods back here on the hillside."

"Too bad," Adamson shook his head, "that the old lady got bit on this. Some

smooth real-estate man unloaded it on her, and she never could sell it. A shame that she did not leave you something that was some use."

The Thinker's deep-set eyes looked at Charley Adamson intently for a moment. Charley was still a handsome, smooth, plausible chap, only now he filled his clothes fuller and he appeared a little slicker.

"It suits me all right," Osborn said.

Adamson laughed. "It is all right to look at; but, good heavens! man, what are you going to do with it? It is seventy miles from nowhere, it is five thousand feet up in the air, and you can't eat it, you know.

"Besides, it will snow after a while, and that tent of yours"—he gave the affair a glance which appraised its evident cheapness—"will be blown away like a paper bag. And then what will the poor robin do then, oh then, poor thing?"

C. P. laughed again, but the Thinker frowned. That was what the girl had said and he had not thought where food would come from when this was gone. He hated Charley Adamson. He always made one uncomfortable—and envious.

Charley invited himself to a chair—the chair against the tree. He talked an hour about "old times" and the boys and girls of Oak Grove School.

Paul let him talk. He was thinking about the winter coming on Palomar. It was now only two or three months off.

Adamson got up and brushed his trousers.

"I tell you, old man," he remarked casually, "I hate to see you marooned up here. I'm going to give you eighteen hundred dollars for your quarter section—five dollars an acre—and take a chance of getting my money back some time."

The Thinker glanced off at the live oak scattered about the valley, and his eyes slipped around to the path up through the pines.

"I don't believe I want to sell it."

Adamson laughed again. "Well, you will. When you do, let me know."

Osborn stood bareheaded under the pine watching the big car bouncing its way across the little valley toward the road that led down the mountain. What did he want the land for? The Thinker rubbed his chin, ruffling the brown beard, and drew down his eyebrows. His thinking had been mostly about races, and nations, and nature. He had never had any personal problems of consequence, and thinking about this one—his land—was a new experience.

He sat down with his back to the tree, and thought about his personal problems for an hour. Why did Adamson want to buy that land? Why did he want to keep it? How was he going to stay and face the winter without food and shelter? He wondered what the girl would do if it were her problem. He believed he would ask her.

He got up. The sun was gone, and dusk was thick in the valley. He heard a twig snap and turned his head slowly. Twenty yards away, standing half concealed by a pine tree, a man was watching him intently. Even in the dusk Osborn recognized him as the heavy-set fellow who stayed at the house up on the hill. He could not see his features, and he had not been close to him, but there was something disquietingly familiar about the man. Like an animal that smells the imminence of danger, the Thinker found the germ of suspicion and uneasiness in his mind.

The fellow slipped away as Osborn started to light his supper fire. "Now why," he thought, "was he watching me like that?"

He was vexed, upset. Among other personal problems thrust upon him, food and shelter, and the presence of the girl, and Adamson's insistence was this last and most disturbing one—a man

spying upon him in the dusk, a man who fairly emanated evil.

III.

For the next two days the Thinker read biology. History and political science he had traced from the beginning down to our own turbulent, chaotic days. And he was forced to confess they brought him to no definite conclusions. They failed to piece together the patchwork puzzle of human existence. No, the answer must be deeper in the organism itself. Thus, he had turned to biology, and from it was trying to construct a rational cause for human existence, and a reasonable theory for its ultimate use.

But not for twenty years had he found it so hard to keep his mind on the subject. Always he had had a remarkable control over his mind. Apparently he could take it by the back of the neck, shake it, and set it on a track of thought, and it would follow the trail like a trained dog until called off.

He had learned to do this during his boyhood. When poverty galled, or loneliness bit in too deep, he discovered that the only way to ease it was to think of something else. And as he had been a very lonely, neglected boy, he had had much practice in thinking of something else. Not being of the kind that covers its hurts by daydreams of romance, he hid himself in a world of speculative thought. Problems were as honey to his palate, but they were all mental problems. If he ventured on a material problem it always brought him face to face again with his poverty and inefficiency. And from that, his mind shrank as a shoulder from a branding iron.

For fifteen years he had held communion with the greatest thinkers of the world through books and letters. But he was not a mere absorber of thought. He did his full share of delving into these abstruse problems. But as the girl from the hill had brought forcibly to his attention, he did not get anything for them—except more thought.

Near sundown he got up from the chair by the tree for the fifth time and walked about the tent. Something had happened to him. Something had thrown him out of gear. For the life of him he could not keep his mind on biology. For the first time in many years sordid, physical problems thrust themselves into his thought with shattering insistence.

Was he going to stay on this land? How would he face the snows? Where would he get food? Would that girl not come down again? If not, should he go up and see her? Why did Adamson want the land? What was the hired man prowling around his camp last night for?

He turned to the door of his tent, flung the biology book sprawling inside, and started up the woods path toward the house at a fast walk. He had reached an answer to one of his problems.

The younger man was in the yard chopping wood. The Thinker again felt there was something sinister about the stocky form, the splotched face, the greenish eyes. The swing of his arms showed strength, but also the twist of his mouth showed distaste for the work. The fellow looked up, surprised at Osborn's approach, and stood for a moment with the ax suspended in the air. Then he let it drop, the head striking the block of wood and glancing off into the ground.

"Can I borrow your ax?" the Thinker asked abruptly.

Shem Gault's mouth opened in further surprise.

"I'm usin' it," he grunted.

"Well, when are you done?"

"I never get done."

"Do you know where I could borrow an ax?" The Thinker was really distressed at this unexpected hitch.

"Know where you can buy one." Shem rubbed his sleeve across his mouth. He was a most disagreeable-looking person.

The girl came to the door, dusting flour from her hands. She had just been rolling biscuit dough. Both men looked toward her. She wore a white all-over apron, and her black hair was fluffy about her head.

"Oh, yes, Shem," she called, "let him have the ax. You can use the old one."

The Thinker glanced uneasily, but gratefully at the girl and was about to turn back.

"Oh, Mr. Osborn," she called from the doorway. "I want you to come in and meet my father."

To Osborn's relief Gault did not follow him into the house, but instead recovered his ax and resumed the spasmodic *whack, whunk, whack* of the intermittent chopper.

Old Pritchard had a thick, ragged iron-gray beard, and bushy gray hair that stood out like a nimbus around a leathery, wrinkled old face, from which peered small, sharp, blue eyes. He had a wooden leg which he could take off to rest his knee. It leaned now against the arm of his chair. A wandering old prospector, settled down at last on his forty acres on Palomar.

"Located down on the creek, Mildred says." The old man pulled at his beard, and the small blue eyes peered inquiringly at the Thinker.

"Yes—my aunt left it to me," Osborn was aware without seeing her that Mildred was standing in the open kitchen door listening, "and I am going to build a house on it." He glanced from the corner of his eyes at the door—and saw her turn back to the kitchen. That queer feeling came over him again.

"I'd like to have a drink," and to his own astonishment followed her into the kitchen.

She was stooping to look at the biscuits, holding the oven door open with the corner of her apron. The lamp on a shelf over the kitchen table shed a light on the soft black hair. Osborn wanted to put his hands on that hair.

She shut the door with a little click and rose, flushed with the heat. She brushed her hair back from her forehead with the sleeve of her left arm.

"Are you going to build a house?" It was a simple remark, but it sounded to the Thinker like an epoch in history, like the achievement of a whole race of men struggling up from caves.

"Yes, I am going to start in the morning."

There did not seem to be much of anything else to say. She busied herself putting plates and knives and forks on the table. They ate in the kitchen. She laid four plates.

"You are going to stay to supper," she said as a matter of course.

"Yes." He replied with that peculiar, unexplained sense of thrill over nothing.

His eyes left her for a moment and looked out of the window. Just outside a peach tree stood outlined in the dusk. There was a sound beside the window as of a foot striking the wall—and he was aware that Shem Gault stood back in the shadow, watching him and the girl.

Old Man Pritchard, stimulated by a fresh audience, launched into a series of personal reminiscences of the early days when he prospected from Alaska to Mexico.

"Your wanderings," said the Thinker, "remind me of Ulysses. Have you ever read the 'Odyssey?'"

The old prospector shook his shaggy head.

"No use fer books—nothin' to 'em. I did read one once that was interestin'. It was called 'The Downfall of Bitterroot Sam,' and was writ in verse by a cowboy. He sure knowed what he was talkin' about."

"The best thoughts in the world are in books," said the Thinker earnestly.

"I ain't very strong for book thinkin'," said the old man. "A thought in a book never roped a steer. It's got to be hitched to a lariat."

During this discussion neither Mildred or Shem Gault offered a word. Mildred was looking alternately from her father to the Thinker, following the argument with the closest interest. Shem was watching Osborn.

Supper over, Osborn pushed back his chair and got up to take his leave. He ran his left hand across his chin, ruffling the short brown beard. Pritchard had started a fresh argument against books.

"I think father is right in a way." Mildred had arisen also and looked smilingly at Osborn. "A thought has to be fastened to something to make it useful."

"A lariat, for instance?" His eyelids wrinkled with an unaccustomed smile.

"Yes, or an ax," the girl nodded. "By the way, you can take the ax when you go, Mr. Osborn."

IV.

The Thinker knew how to use the ax. When a boy he had chopped the wood and chopping, like swimming, is a thing one never forgets. But for many years his muscles had been neglected and his food irregular. After a dozen strokes his arms ached, his breath came in gasps, and blisters appeared on his hands.

After innumerable rests he got the tree down—a small, straight pine. How long did he want that log? He had not even decided how large to make his house. He sat down on the trunk and started to think about it. A tune came liltingly through the morning woods. The girl was coming down the path again carrying a basket. His heart jumped excitedly, he felt that strange exultation. He watched her come. She was good to see. If only she had brains! If only she could think!

"Good morning, woodsman." She nodded brightly, and turned in at the door of his tent. He felt a sudden sense of horror—in what shape had he left things? But when she came out a minute later she was not struck dead with what she had seen, anyway, for she came over to where he was resting on the log, put one foot on it, and stood with the basket on her knee.

"Baked this morning, and had more bread than we can use. Thought you might like a loaf for that nickel I owe you."

"Thank you." He rubbed his bearded chin. He wondered at that moment how he would look if clean shaved.

"You going to make your cabin about eighteen feet square?"

"Yes," he replied.

"That's about right," she remarked, "gives you room for a bed, a stove, a table, and leaves you a little space to move around in. I suppose you plan to have a stove first, and then when you get time, build your fireplace?"

"Yes," he announced, "that is the way I figured it."

"The floor and the roof are the hardest," she remarked, puckering her lips in a thoughtful frown. "They cost money."

"Yes, I suppose I will have to buy planks for the floor—and shingles—and nails."

"And windows," she added.

"I don't see how I can do it." He spoke with sudden helplessness. "Still, other people have built houses."

"Yes," she repeated, "all the world over, men have built little houses, for the women that they love."

"What?" He felt a queer surge in his side. "What did you say?"

"I was just repeating two lines from a poem I read once in a magazine." She set down her basket, and walked over to the stump, picked up a pine chip, and sniffed it.

"I love the smell of fresh wood. You know a great deal about ships, don't you?"

"I made a special study of ships one whole year. I thought of writing a book on them."

With a lift of her gray eyes, Mildred indicated a deeper interest than another woman could have done with a whole pageant of adjectives.

The Thinker sat down on the log, locked his hands about his knees, and began to talk to her about ships. He went back six thousand years to the dugouts on the Nile, with their first square sails. He traced the development of these river boats until the lure of the incense at a port beyond the Red Sea had made them into seagoing vessels.

"And it is curious," he said, "that the A-shaped mast used by these early Egyptians, was again put in use by the British navy not twenty years ago."

He pictured for her the development of the ship under the Phœnicians until it sailed around the continent of Africa and perhaps crossed the Atlantic to South America; the building of the Greek and Roman triremes; the development of the viking ships of the North Seas. He told her of the beginning and growth of the English navy until that nation in the tenth century had four thousand fighting ships. Then of the falling away during internal wars until in 1430 the British navy consisted of only two or three dismantled hulks.

Then followed the growth of the Spanish and Dutch and English shipbuilding, changing to meet the dangers of war, and to fit the convenience of commerce. On down until steam had puffed the sails from the spars, and steel had replaced the wood in the hulls.

For more than an hour he held her with these vivid pictures of the ships of the world.

"How interesting!" Her eyes were alight. "Why don't you write that?"

"I could not write it like that." He realized suddenly that he had never written like that. He had always written the clear, authentic facts, shorn of every vestige of color and romance. But to her, he had been drawing pictures, making the facts interesting. He wondered why he had never done that before.

"You know," her forehead creased with thought, "San Diego is now a big harbor for warships—more than a hundred there, and everybody is interested in them. Why don't you write what you told me for the Sunday paper down there—and make enough money to buy your floor and roof?"

After she was gone, he thought that over from every angle. It was not a bad idea at all. He could write a series of articles on the history of fighting ships for the Sunday paper. He would make them simple for people like Mildred who were not educated, and did not think. Perhaps they would pay him fifteen or twenty dollars apiece. He could do a lot with a hundred dollars.

He left his chopping and went to the tent and wrote one of the articles that afternoon.

The chopping went slow, but he stuck to it grimly day after day until he had twenty eighteen-foot logs cut. He sat down on a stump and wiped his forehead with his sleeve. It was an appallingly long job. He had never dreamed how many logs it would take. They all had to be notched at the end and trimmed on the sides so they would lie flat and not leave big cracks to be plugged up with mortar. He remembered the process of building log houses from his boyhood in the Ozarks.

Wasn't there any shorter way to do it? He sat thinking over this. Pine split easily. Why couldn't he make two out of each one? He got up and struck a log evenly in the end with an ax. It split down eight feet with one lick. He stuck a heavy chip in the opening, drew out his ax, and then struck further down the log. Four licks and he had it split into fairly even halves.

Now, what would he do with them?

If he could use them that way, the twenty already cut would be enough. But how could he use them?

Why not take four solid corner posts, and nail these slabs to them, edge to edge, the split side in? He could do it all himself, then, and it would be much faster. Besides, it would be easy to trim the edges with the ax so they would fit fairly close.

All day as he went busily about splitting the logs he felt an unusual satisfaction. This puzzled him, for it was not much of a thing to think out. Yet, it was a good deal, for it saved him at least two weeks' hard work, and after all, that was something. Mildred Pritchard would be pleased with it. She seemed to set a good deal of store by "thoughts attached to something." He hoped she would come down this afternoon. He had not seen her for several days.

But instead of Mildred, Shem Gault came about sundown. Osborn and Shem had not met since the evening Paul took supper at the Pritchards', and the Thinker fancied he had gone away. He felt vaguely uneasy at Shem's approach, and instinctively glanced around to see if the ax or a club were in reach. It was foolish, he knew, to feel apprehensive, but something in Gault's green eyes, his splotched face, and half-slithering movement of his heavy body, made one feel he was intending something devilish.

"Hello, Osborn." Shem grinned, showing stained teeth.

"Hello." The Thinker was pouring a dipper of water from a bucket, into the coffeepot.

Gault sat down in a chair near the tent door, and watched him rake out coals and set the coffeepot. He reached down and picked up a pine needle and chewed the end of it.

"Reckon you heard the Pritchards are selling out?"

"No." Osborn felt as though a fog had suddenly swooped down over his whole mental vista.

"Yeah—just as well—the Power Company is going to build a dam and flood the whole valley. If they had not sold out, the court would have condemned their land, and they wouldn't have got as much for it, and would have had to wait three or four years before they got any."

"Is that why Adamson wanted my land?" The Thinker stood over the fire, his face greenish in the light.

"Yeah—goin' to flood all the valley."

"And Pritchards have sold?"

"The girl's gone down to town now to fix it up."

Gault laughed a weird cackle without meaning.

The Thinker glanced around again to see where the ax lay, and the fingers closed tightly in his hands.

"Are you going to sell to Adamson?" Shem took a plug of tobacco from his overall pocket and bit off a chew.

"I haven't decided," he said slowly, drearily. The Pritchards were going away.

"Better," said Shem. "He'll take it if you don't."

V.

The last Monday in November the Thinker finished the walls of his house. Still carrying the hammer in his hand with which he had driven the last spike, he walked around it twice, looking at the carefully fitted logs. He had done a very good job, and he felt a degree of satisfaction he had never known before. He had needed a house and had built it. It was his.

He wished Mildred Pritchard could see it. She and her father had been gone a month—ever since Shem Gault had told him they were selling out. Osborn had used every mental trick he knew—evasion, coercion, concentration—to keep his mind from her. But it always came back. He had felt a per-

sonal pique that she had gone way without seeing him or telling him anything about it.

In the afternoon the Thinker walked across the shoulder of the mountain to the little store and post office three miles east. He had written the ship articles —five of them—and sent them down to the San Diego Sunday paper. That was nearly a month ago, and he had not heard anything of them. Not only did his house yet lack a roof and floor, but his food supply was down to the last sack of flour and three boxes of raisins. Yet, as he walked through the pine woods he was thinking more about the possibility of getting a letter from Mildred than one from the Sunday paper.

There were a number of letters for him. The Thinker always got a good deal of mail. He did not open any of it while in the store, but waited until he was down the road well into the woods. He sat down on a log in the sun, and looked at the postmarks on the letters. Three of them were from San Diego. One from the Western Power Company he opened first.

DEAR OLD THINKER: Am coming up Wednesday to see you about your land. I'm trying to be of help to you, so don't be a mule or an iceberg. Am going to bring you a box of grapefruit from my ranch.

C. F. ADAMSON.

The second was from the Sunday paper. The Thinker's fingers shook a bit as he tore the end from the envelope. It was a check for forty dollars. They had used two of the articles and were going to use the other three.

And the third letter he held in his hand a moment before opening. The address was written by a feminine hand. Could it be——

It was from Mildred!

DEAR MR. OSBORN: I read your article in the paper Sunday. It is fine! Do some more. How is the house coming? We will be back next week.

MILDRED PRITCHARD.

The other letters, some of them from Europe, one from India and two from South America—letters from other great world thinkers—he stuffed unopened into his pocket, got up and started back for the store, walking with a long, rapid swing of his thin legs.

The storekeeper cashed his check and agreed to telephone down to the city to ask the truck coming up the next day to bring flooring and shingles, two windows, sleepers and rafters.

Wednesday, when the big machine of the Western Power Company picked its way with little angry snorts over the bumps in the valley, Osborn was on the cabin nailing up rafters.

Adamson stood on the ground, his hands in his pockets, waiting for Osborn to come down. But the Thinker continued his work as though the anxious and irritated visitor below was merely a fidgety bug. Not until the last rafter was in place did he climb down. Walking a little distance back he studied the slope solemnly, and nodded his head with approval.

"I think I got that about right."

"See here, Paul," Charley Adamson's patience was pretty well cracked by that two hours' wait in the sun, "this is all foolishness. You are wasting your time. I might as well tell you frankly, this whole valley is to be flooded."

The Thinker's brows moved up and down frowningly a moment.

"That is what Shem Gault said."

Adamson cleared his throat. "Of course, I intended to tell you all the time, only a big corporation has to keep its moves under cover to prevent being held up. The directors wanted me to proceed at once to have the land condemned, but I told them, I'd be damned if I did, that Paul Osborn was a friend of mine, and he had got to have a square deal. You know, Paul, in this State if a public service corporation needs a piece of land, they can have it condemned."

"And pay for it." The Thinker was looking at the cabin and not at the vice president of the Western Power Company.

"Of course. But you understand the price fixed is always nearly nothing. I have been fighting my head off for you with our board of directors—I've at last forced them to agree to pay you three thousand two hundred dollars—twenty dollars an acre.

"And I did it, Paul, for old times' sake. To take advantage of it, you will have to act at once."

Adamson suited action with words, and held toward the Thinker a deed and a fountain pen.

The Thinker glanced off over the valley, his eyes lingered on the giant pines near the edge. He shook his head.

"I'm much obliged, Charley. I may have to sell, but I'd like to hold on to it a little longer." He turned to a small pile of lumber and began to measure off a sleeper.

Charley Adamson felt a murderous fury but he swallowed it.

"Then, Paul, if you are not ready to sell now, suppose you give me an option?"

"What is that, Charley?"

"It is an agreement that if you sell at all within a certain time, you will give me the first chance, and that in case of your death, I may have the land at a certain price."

"I guess that would be all right." The Thinker had taken up one end of a sleeper, and was sighting it to see if it was straight.

Adamson sat down on the pile of lumber and wrote a dozen lines on the back of the deed. Then he handed it to Osborn.

The Thinker read it over casually.

"I guess that's all right, Charley." He put the paper on his knee, and reached for the fountain pen.

"You generally get a little money on an option, don't you?"

"Yes—if you like," Adamson responded readily. "How much do you think you ought to have, Paul?"

He reflected a moment, figuring how much it would take him to get through the winter. "About three hundred dollars I reckon, Charley."

VI.

Late in the afternoon, two weeks later, the Thinker looked up to the house on the hill, and saw blue smoke coming from the chimney. He had watched for that a hundred times. It was ridiculous, the feelings a little curl of blue smoke gave him.

He knew he was a fool for feeling that way. It was some trick of nature's, some stupid force trying to chain his thoughts down to sordid earth. That girl was ignorant—at least she was unlettered. She had never mentioned her schooling, but he doubted if she had even been to high school. She did not read books—anyway, she never referred to them if she did. She was not intellectual, she was not a thinker, just physical. But in spite of his higher intelligence he could not help but feel some cosmic sort of gladness at the thought of her being physical. She was quite charmingly physical—and she was quiet and magnetic.

He laid down his hammer and went up the path through the pines.

The doors were open. She was not in the house. He passed around back and crossed the garden. She was in the orchard.

The soil of the garden he noticed was loose and black. Tomato vines sprawled like bushes, loaded with large, ripe tomatoes. There were rows of undug potatoes, two ridges of sweet potatoes, a dozen pepper plants with red pods, a patch of late sweet corn, and bean vines, still green, climbing sticks.

A score of trees were laden with red apples and two late peach trees bent under their load of yellow fruit.

The girl was gathering the peaches. She was bareheaded, as usual, and the sun looked warm and caressing on her soft, dark hair. There was a pliant, vital roundness to her whole body.

"Good afternoon." His heart beat so he felt confused and embarrassed.

"Why, how do you do?" She straightened up as though just aware of his presence.

"You have got some good news." She looked at him understandingly. "I see it in your eyes."

"My house is done—come down and see it."

She left the basket of peaches under the tree, and went with eagerness.

Scattered through the lonely life of the Thinker there had been a few moments of great thrill. Once at the university when it was announced that he was one of the honor graduates. Once when he stood in cap and gown to receive his Ph.D. Again when he saw his name first in print in a magazine. And once again when he had read a warm letter of approval from one of Europe's greatest scholars.

But all these scholastic achievements seemed as pale as moonlight on dead leaves beside the flame of pride that enveloped him as he showed this unlettered country girl the crude cabin he had made with his own hands.

"It's wonderful how well you have done." Her gray eyes were alight with approval. "You won't be afraid of the snows now."

And she began to plan with him how to dispose of the space in that eighteen-foot room—the place for the stove, the bed, the table, the cupboard. She took it for granted he was going to build a cupboard, and further, tactfully, she took it for granted he was going to build it so and so. And he admitted that was what he planned.

They took chairs in the sun. He turned them so they could see the house at the best angle.

He ruffled the brown beard on his chin with his left hand, wondering again if he would look better if it were shaved.

"You've sold your place?" he asked.

"I'm afraid so." She looked distressed. "They got daddy down to town and they have been after him night and day. I did my best to keep him from selling. He won't say whether he has signed anything or not, but I'm afraid he has. We came back to-day, and he keeps talking about how much better it will be for me in town.

"I really think," she said, an understanding sympathy lighting her face, "that he's got the prospecting fever again, and wants to take the mountain trails once more with burro and pick. I'd miss him terribly, but if it's in one's blood to do a thing, I guess they are happier doing it, and I won't try to keep him."

"No," he said solemnly, "when the gods drive a man to the desert or the sea, don't try to stop him."

"And don't the gods ever drive a man to stay on the top of a mountain?" She looked at him from the corners of her gray eyes.

"Yes," he nodded grimly, "but Adamson and the Power Company say the gods be damned."

"And you," she said, glancing away from him, "I suppose, will listen to the voice of Adamson?"

He looked at her a long time before he replied. It was the most momentous physical decision he had ever faced.

"No," he said slowly, "I'll listen to the gods."

VII.

The Thinker realized after Mildred had gone, that the resolution he had reached implied a struggle—a struggle of a sort which he had never undergone in his life before.

For some reason—a reason he had begun to suspect—a very powerful company wanted his land. They were ex-

perienced in material conflicts, they had backing in politics, in courts, and unlimited money. In a fight against them, what did he have? Nothing; absolutely nothing. Even less than nothing, for it was a problem whether he could hold onto the land even left entirely alone. As a fighter, he was twenty degrees below total loss. Yet he had practically made up his mind he was going to stay.

In his mental research he had faced problems—hundreds of them. But they were all questions that began with "Why?" This primitive, material problem—the problem of getting bread and shelter and holding onto his patch of land—was an entirely new one, for it raised a different question, one that began with "How?"

The more he thought of it, the more doubtful he became that Adamson had given him his real reason for wanting the land. He had been to a good deal of pains to buy Pritchard's forty acres, which, no matter how high the dam should be built, would still be far above the water line.

The Thinker was on the creek a hundred yards below his house building a box, when he became aware some one was watching him. He straightened up, and looked over his shoulder.

"Hello!" It was Mildred.

"How do you do?" He turned, came up the bank, and sat down a few feet from her. She glanced curiously at the wide pine box he had embedded in the bottom of the creek, and asked no questions.

He turned his head and looked at her. He could not account for the satisfaction it gave him. She was bareheaded, as usual, and wore a black skirt and white waist. The waist was open at the throat, and the skin showed soft, and velvety. Her hair was glossy in its vivid luxuriance. He had an impulse to show off, to say something that would exhibit his great mentality. He remembered how interested she had been in his talk about ships. His present pursuit was biology, and he began on it, at first quite technically, and then he found himself skipping duller stretches of research, or discussing the drift of life—the struggle the life germ makes to persist.

"All the myriad activities of fields and woods, plants and animals and birds; all the infinitely varied struggles and ecstasies and suffering of human life, are the result of the great life force seeking to perpetuate itself.

"This body," he spread out his hands, "is indubitable proof that a thousand, perhaps a hundred thousand ancestors of mine, in an unbroken line have survived the bitter fight of existence until they at least reached the estate of manhood."

She was looking down into the clear ripple of the creek as it ran through his trap box, apparently not listening. He fancied she was even smiling at something entirely foreign to his discussion.

"I suppose science doesn't interest you at all." He spoke from a lofty pique. "No doubt it sounds dull to people who do not think."

Color crept up her neck and cheek, and her eyes grew a bit snappy.

"You mean that I don't think?" There was resentment in the tone.

"I don't mean," he halfway apologized, "that you haven't any mind. I merely mean you're not a thinker—you don't consider things in an abstruse way."

"I was thinking a while ago." A deep, significant smile curved the corners of her full lips.

"What were you thinking?" He was curious to see a specimen of her thought.

She reached down at her side and picked up a thin sliver of rock, and looked at it—a trick she had of noticing one thing, and speaking of another.

"I was thinking the life force would have a hard time of it if every one acted like you—and did nothing but think about it."

He did not catch the significance of the remark immediately, only the criticism. And criticism from her stung him. "The thinkers," he said hotly, "are the great forces of the world. They work unselfishly and intelligently for the progress of life—and they are never paid for it, unless perhaps with a torch or flail."

"Do you know why great thinkers are usually poor, while even little doers are often rich?" She lifted her eyes to his.

"Because the world does not know values." He had thought this out many times. "They prefer little things to big ones; cheap, shoddy ones to great and precious ones."

She shook her head. A crease formed between her curved eyebrows.

"No. Somewhere in the Bible it says, 'Give unto Cæsar the things that are Cæsar's.' Thinkers who think thoughts are paid in thoughts—while people who think things are paid in things."

He stared at her as though she was some unaccountable discovery. Just where did she get ideas like that?

"What do you mean?" He understood, but wanted to see if she did.

"You think about ships. You may know more about ships of Egypt and Greece and Spain than anybody. Well, you get your pay in other thoughts from other people interested in ancient ships.

"But a man in Seattle thinks of lumber ships. He gets paid in lumber and profits in lumber."

He still stared at her. An argument like that from an unlettered country girl who did not think was astounding.

"What are you doing there?" She nodded at the box in the creek bed, unable longer to resist her curiosity.

"Measuring the flow."

"What for?"

"To see if Adamson lied. I don't believe he intends to build a dam. I do not believe there is water enough."

She got up, and turning on him with a long, approving look, nodded her head.

"Now, you are thinking things."

They walked along the bank toward the cabin. His eyes ran ahead to it with possessive pride.

"Have you sold your place?"

A distressed frown crossed her face. "I don't know. Daddy won't say. I'm worried."

That afternoon he went up the path toward the Pritchards'. He felt queerly restless when out of sight of the girl.

Old Pritchard was sitting in the yard, his back against the wall, and his wooden leg at rest against the arm of the chair. He greeted the Thinker with a friendly nod, and a sharp scrutiny out of his shrewd old eyes.

"Sit down." He motioned to the doorstep. He glanced furtively over his shoulder to see that Mildred was not within hearing.

"Reckon I've sold out," he said, a confidential drop in his husky tone. "I ain't broke it to her yet, she's so set against it. You see," he scratched his temples, "men and women folks aren't alike. She's got the orchard and the garden going and loves to potter in the kitchen cooking up batches of grub, and when it snows, she piles wood on the fire and laughs and says how nice it is to have shelter.

"Now, a man don't want shelter—don't care nuthin' for it. I've been waitin' these fifteen years to go stampin' off with a burro and a roll of blankets and a pick. I know a place over in Arizona ——" and he trailed off into the universal dream of the prospector, a rich vein of gold that no one else has found.

He shook the shaggy old head. "I just had to sell out. Hated to, though—on her account. I wouldn't have done it only she's goin' to be settled in a place of her own afore long. She and Shem Gault is goin' to git married soon—and Shem has a good stand-in with the Power Company."

The Thinker got up quickly and went down the path almost at a run, his tall

thin frame swaying, his feet stumbling as though half blind.

He was standing in front of his cabin, rigid and motionless, looking toward the shadows of dusk along the bottom when he heard Mildred coming down the path. He did not turn or speak as she approached.

"Oh, Mr. Osborn," Mildred was a little out of breath, "why did you go so quickly? I wanted you to stay for supper."

"I don't want any supper." The reply came short and sharp. And without glancing toward her, he stalked away toward the creek.

Hurt, mystified, then angry, she climbed the path back to the house.

VIII.

For three days the Thinker moped. He sat out in the sun staring off at the pine and live oak along the creek. He did not read nor think—just ached. He had always thought of himself as isolated—apart—because of his great thinking. Now, he felt it was only plain loneliness. He had never wanted material things—at least he had always told himself he did not. Perhaps that, too, was a mental trick to save himself the struggle of getting them. His mother, he could not remember. From the beginning he had lived with his father—a dreamy, bookish man in a torn-down cabin in those remote Ozark hills. He had loved his father—and the father had loved him. He had died when Paul was fifteen. Since then he had never been loved.

Now, he wanted to be loved, but she loved Shem Gault! A coarse, ignorant brute. He hated Shem Gault!

The fourth day the lethargy passed, and he became possessed with a demon of restlessness. He decided he must have a fireplace before winter came on, and started out hunting suitable rock. There was plenty of rock, but he wanted smooth, flat rock that could be easily chipped into shape. He searched up and down the creek, and along the bluff chipping the rock here and there with his hammer.

None of the rock quite suited him. He left the creek near the west line of his land, and turned north where he saw some outcroppings of ledge up the slope. Just beyond a clump of bushes near the line where his land met that of the Pritchards', he found some good rock—and somebody had been using it. At least it looked as though they had started a quarry. There were a lot of broken pieces, and some digging around the base of the ledge. One place that was mostly concealed by falling leaves looked as though it had been blasted.

For the next month the Thinker worked as though possessed. He scarcely ate or slept; he read not at all. He got a man to haul the rock, and had a little help in putting up the largest stones, but for the most part he built the fireplace himself. It was hard work and slow. But by the middle of November the thing was completed.

That night he tried out the fireplace. It worked! The chimney sucked up the smoke with a good strong draft, and the pine knots snapped and sputtered as the flames encircled them.

The Thinker's eyes went from the blaze to the mantel—a heavy twelve-inch board, supported by sturdy wooden brackets. He felt proud of the jamb and the hearth, too. He had made them all. He stood up before the fire. The heat felt good. The crackling wood was music. It was cloudy outside, with a northwest wind that threatened snow. He turned his back to the blaze. The light threw into pleasant outlines the room, with its bed and table, stove, cupboard, and chairs. It was his—all made by him. The thought and the fire warmed him through and through, all except the one cold, numb spot of loneliness in his heart which no fire could warm.

He had not been up the hill to the

Pritchards' for a month, nor spoken to Mildred since the evening Pritchard had told him she was to marry Shem Gault. At first he had felt angry at her—angry without reason—as though he had a personal grievance against her.

But during the month of mental restlessness and hard physical labor he had gradually come to see that he really had no right to count himself into the problem at all. To-night he felt friendly toward her and wanted her to admire his fireplace.

He climbed the hill. The broken clouds were scudding before a wintry wind, and the pine trees moaned in the November night. He hesitated a moment at the gate, feeling a bit awkward and ashamed. Far off across the dim stretches of darkness were the lights of the city—miles and miles of empty space on this mountain—and he a little moving atom in a world of darkness. The numb chill loneliness in his heart spread until it enveloped him, until he was lost in empty space of nothingness.

He resolutely opened the gate and went in.

A low exclamation of surprised pleasure broke from Mildred as she opened the door. She shook hands with him as though he had returned from a long journey.

At the touch of her hand—soft, warm and enveloping—the loneliness scattered as if by magic. He felt warm all over.

"Just got my fireplace done and it draws fine," he said, standing on the door step. "Won't you come down and see it?"

"I would love to." She turned back into the room, threw on a coat, and came out, closing the door behind her.

He took her arm as they started down the path, and she pressed the fingers against her side with a shiver:

"Oh, it's blowy to-night, isn't it?"

"Yes, but I like it." It seemed a stirring night to him.

She praised the fireplace. "It is big and rough and useful. And I like the mantel, too."

She sat before the fire. He stood with his elbow on the mantel and looked down at her. The dark hair in the firelight, her full, soft lips, the turn of her neck, sent his pulses beating until they almost stopped his breath.

"Have you sold your land?"

"Not yet." A frown gathered between her brows. "Daddy signed some sort of an agreement—but they say I have to sign the deed, too. I suppose I will, but I'm putting it off."

"They don't want our land for a dam site," he told her. "I've measured the flow of water, I've figured the water shed and the rainfall. There is not enough run-off to be of any use as power.

"There is a professor at Berkeley in the university, who wrote to me once about some of my investigations. Two weeks ago I wrote to him about it, and he inquired of the commission. There is no application in for a dam site."

She looked up and her lips parted in surprise.

"Then why do they want it?"

He shook his head. "I have not determined yet."

She looked into the fire and puckered her lips in speculation.

"I wonder if that is why Shem Gault advised me not to sign the deed?"

"I don't know why he would advise you not to sign the deed when he is working for Adamson."

"Neither do I." She seemed still more puzzled. "You're sure he's working for Adamson?"

"Yes, he has tried to scare me into selling to him."

"I don't understand it," she shook her head, "unless——"

"Of course"—Osborn had a thought, a bitter one—"if there is something that makes the land really valuable, he wouldn't want you to sell when he is going to marry you."

"Marry me?" She flung up her head and stared at him. "Me marry Shem Gault?" She broke into a laugh that was more musical to the Thinker than had he heard the morning stars sing together.

He went back with her up the hill. His hand held her arm close against his side. As they walked, their bodies touched now and again, and once he felt her soft hair brush against his neck. The darkness was full of pulsing light and the winter wind was warm upon his face. Not a word of personal feeling was spoken. But at the door she gave him her hand again, and in her "Good night" was an enveloping warmth.

The Thinker went down the path scarcely noticing when his feet stumbled on the rocks. Physical exaltation was a new and strange experience to him—but wonderful and vivid! So much more vivid than anything he had ever known.

Near the edge of the pine woods above his cabin, he was brought back to consciousness of his surroundings by a movement in the darkness—a form slipping along from tree to tree parallel with his course.

IX.

The Thinker stood peering out into the darkness. There was just enough light to see the outlines of objects. The man stalking him had slipped behind the trunk of one of the trees.

To be followed in the night by something unseen and unknown stirs in a man the primitive fear of a thousand ancestors who had to hide, climb, flee, or fight for their lives.

The wind ran eerily through the tops of the pines. Night and wide lonesome spaces, dark, and these soughing trees —and something hiding and watching. Osborn felt as though cold fingers touched his spine. But nothing stirred, and looking back over his shoulder he went on to his cabin, pushed the door open, and almost leaped inside, shoving the door shut, and dropping the latch.

The fire had burned down to a bed of coals, and two small chunks that blazed smolderingly. He did not light a lamp, but stood with his back to the fire looking toward the window. The room was very dimly lighted by the coals, and he could see into the semidarkness outside.

Something was moving there. He stood aside from the fire, hid in the shadow of the jamb. Slowly, cautiously, a head arose until the face was against the window.

It was Shem Gault.

Osborn did not stir from the shadow. He knew he was not visible from the window. The face disappeared in a moment.

The Thinker's heart was beating against his ribs with slow, but explosive knocks. He had no window blinds to draw and no arms with which to defend himself. He waited five minutes—ten.

There was a knocking at the door. For a moment he stood with his back against the wall. His heart doubled its beat. The knocking came again more insistent. That would not do, Osborn told himself. Much better to face it. He went to the lamp on the mantel, and his hand did not shake as he applied a match to the wick.

Then he opened the door.

"Hello." Shem Gault standing on the step spoke in the tone of a casual visitor. "Thought I'd drop in and see your cabin."

"Come in." The Thinker closed the door after him, and offered him a chair.

But Gault did not sit. Instead, he went to the south window and peered out for two or three minutes. Then, tiptoeing, with his hat in his hand, he crossed over to the north window and again looked out searchingly.

He came back to the fire, took the offered chair, put his hat on his left knee, and sat shaking his head.

The Thinker's eyes had not left him. In Gault's splotchy face and greenish eyes there was something loathsome and cunningly sinister. His right hand was in his coat pocket; and as a burned chunk in the fireplace broke and flared up for a moment, Osborn saw the outline of a revolver barrel against the cloth.

"Did you know some one followed you as you left Pritchard's a while ago?"

"Yes."

"I think I know who it was." Shem assumed a look of concern. "I was just coming in, and when I saw the fellow slipping after you, I followed. He heard me, I guess, and that is why he did not attack you."

Osborn still stood at the side of the hearth looking down at Gault.

"Why should he want to attack me?"

Shem looked up as though surprised.

"Don't you know?"

"I do not," replied the Thinker precisely.

Gault looked into the fire, and appeared deliberating on whether to explain or not.

"I'll tell you." He lifted his head with resolution. "Adamson has hired a man to kill you."

"What for?" The Thinker did not appear startled.

"For your land. He got you to sign an option. If you die he gets the land for three thousand dollars. He has hired a gunman to croak you."

Gault and the Thinker looked at each other. The hate between them was almost palpable.

"Well?" Osborn insisted.

"This fellow he has hired," continued Gault, "is a bad one. He has killed four men already that I know of. And he's worse than a bloodhound. Set him after a man and he always gets him.

"He was after you to-night. He'd have got you if I hadn't come along. He'll hide in the woods watchin', watchin' day and night. He'll shoot through the window, or as you step from the door, or as you go down to the creek for water, or up the path to the Pritchards'.

"He's hired to kill you. He don't get his money until he does. He is a dope fiend, and he is broke. He is crazy for dope—and he's got to have the money.

"Your life," Shem went on in a monotonous singsong, "ain't worth a snowflake in hell with him hangin' on your trail."

"What had I bette. do?" The Thinker moved a step back toward the corner of the jamb. He felt an unutterable hate and repulsion for that sinister thing sitting there.

"There's only one thing to do—and that's to deed over the land to Adamson. Then he'll call off this murderer. If you'll deed it over, I'll go down with you to-night or to-morrow, and you'll get your three thousand, and you can take a ship somewhere. It won't be safe for you to stay here after you have sold your land."

"And what do you get out of it?" The Thinker believed what this lump of evil was saying, only he knew that Gault himself was the hired assassin.

"Oh, I'll get mine." He looked up with a leer and moistened his lips. "For one thing, I'll get that girl up there on the hill." Gault's third-party disguise slipped for a moment, and he fairly snarled: "I'd have had her before now, if you hadn't butted in."

Never before, so far as he knew, had the Thinker's life been in danger. But his mind, face to face with the primal problem of self-preservation, worked with swift cunning. Gault was the tool hired by Adamson to get that deed. There was something very valuable on the land—something they were willing to commit murder for. If he could get it by a scare, so much the better. But he meant murder.

Not only primitive cunning, but primitive anger came to life in the Thinker.

This was his land—the girl on the hill his, if he could win her. The repulsive brute sitting there with his hand on a gun was trying to take them from him.

"The fire is nearly out," he remarked in a detached tone, and crossed the hearth to the pile of wood at the left of the fireplace. On this side, Gault could no longer keep him covered while the gun remained in his pocket.

Osborn threw three sticks on the fire. He stooped for the fourth. This time his fingers closed on a four-foot stick, almost as large as his wrist which he had brought in for a poker.

As he straightened up he swung around with amazing swiftness and struck Gault across the forehead with the club.

He left the limp body lying on the floor, and went up the hill to the Pritchards' place.

The old man hobbled to the door in his nightgown.

The Thinker, on the doorstep, announced coolly:

"I've killed Shem Gault."

X.

It was spring. The willows were in full leaf along the creek and the peach trees were in bloom on the hill. The Thinker, with a borrowed horse, was plowing in the loose, fertile soil down by the creek.

There had been some rain and heavy snow during the winter, but most of the time the sun had shone, and the weather was mild. Never in his life had Osborn such an opportunity to delve into research, to think, and write, as he had these past four months.

But he had scarcely delved into a single abstruse volume and he had written none at all. He had been too busy clearing a five-acre patch down in the bottom. He had been down in the city but once during the whole winter, and that was the trip down with the unconscious Shem Gault. Shem had not died after all, but had spent two months in the hospital. Osborn had called upon C. P. Adamson before his return, and had little difficulty in getting back the option he had given the Power Company.

He had worked hard at the clearing, chopping the timber into posts and wood, burning the brush, and picking up the few loose stones. When the weather had been too stormy, or the ground too deep with snow, he had not been lonesome. Many of the evenings he had sat before Pritchard's fire. And sometimes they had sat before his. Occasionally Mildred had come alone and spent the evening before his fireplace, the while mending some of his clothes, or planning with him a new piece of homemade convenience.

To-day as he plowed, he stopped from time to time, and kicked at the loose black soil gloatingly. It was rich. It would grow anything and it would be easy to till.

As he made the turn at the edge of the patch, he could glimpse through the open pines above the Pritchards' garden. Mildred was out planting onion sets. Watching her, the world felt full of warmth and richness.

A far-off honk disturbed the stillness. The Thinker with the lines around his wrists, turned between the plow handles and looked down the valley. A machine was coming through the opening between the scattered live oak trees. It was not Adamson. The driver picked his way with more caution.

The machine stopped near the cabin. A lean chap got out and came down to where the Thinker waited at the edge of his field.

The stranger had a clean face, with cool blue eyes, and his air and dress suggested an Englishman or Canadian.

"I am Cuthbert," he said, the tone and nod reserved and formal, "of Sudbury, Ontario. You are Mr. Osborn?"

"Yes." The Thinker acknowledged the introduction quite as coolly.

"I understand there is nickel on your land." The Canadian came directly to the point. "If you don't mind, I should like to see it."

The Thinker's mind made swift connection of all the events of the past month. He had it now—the whole solution. That was why Adamson wanted his land so badly that he hired Shem Gault to commit murder for it—a nickel mine! And it must be up at the ledge where he got his rock for the fireplace.

"No, I don't mind." He tied the lines to the handle of the plow, and they went up through the pine woods. He liked this matter-of-fact Canadian. He seemed to know what he was about and made no secret of it.

After an hour's examination of the rock and the formation, Cuthbert turned to where the Thinker sat in the sun waiting.

"There is nickel here," he said frankly, "the only place, I believe, in the United States. The outcropping is promising. It may be very rich. It may not. Mining, you know, is very risky and an expensive operation.

"You are a long way from transportation. The machinery must be hauled up here, the ore hauled away. I'd say at a venture that fifty thousand dollars would be a very fair price for your land." He promptly handed Osborn a card.

"If you want to sell for that, you'll find me at the Grant Hotel for two days. If not, very well."

They went down the hill, and he watched the mining man drive away.

The Thinker leaned on the handle of the plow. Fifty thousand dollars! Riches, leisure, endless research in great libraries and scholastic centers. Plenty of time to write, chances to meet the great thinkers of the world!

He heard a voice—a girl's voice—singing something about "The Bonnie Banks of Clyde." Mildred was coming down through the pine woods with a paper bag in her hand. She was bringing cookies or onion sets.

He watched her as she came, bareheaded, with a sheen on her dark hair. Her full throat bare to the spring wind, her lips soft and red.

The Thinker looked down at the soil and stirred it with his shoe. He smelled the earth, smelled the spring in the woods, his eyes went to the cabin he had built with his own hands.

The years of abstruse study, of hard delving after thought slipped away. The earth that made things grow was good. The girl, and that strong, overwhelming elation he felt in her nearness, was good.

Should he tell her of that offer of fifty thousand dollars for his land? Somehow the thought of what that money would bring did not stir him. Cities, even libraries and great thinkers did not appeal now. The earth, the soil, the seasons, the work of his hands—growing grain and fruit, seemed real and sweet to him. Was he reverting to the primitive ancestors, who lived like this, or was he looking ahead to the time when men—his descendants among them—would come back to simple toil and plain, uncomplicated living?

He did not know, and did not try to answer it, but turned to greet the girl with a welcoming warmth in his deep-set eyes. He put up his hand to his chin—clean shaved now—and rubbed it thoughtfully.

"I think I can guess what you bring."

She laughed and gave him three guesses. He needed only one.

She followed him around over the five acres and suggested he put sweet corn here and peas there and sweet potatoes yonder.

As she started to go back up the hill he called:

"May I come up to supper?"

"Of course, what a silly question,"

she laughed. But there was the light of spring in her eyes.

After supper, the old man sat in front of the cabin, smoking.

"Let's not do the dishes now," she said, going to the open door restlessly.

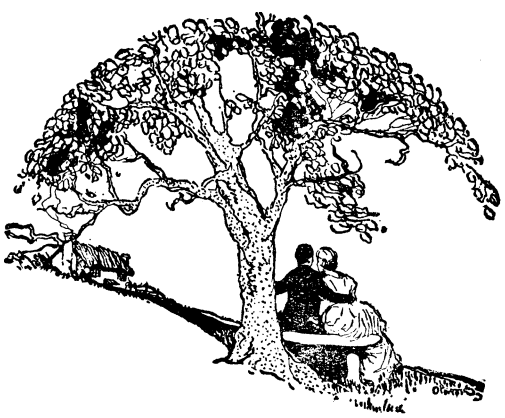
"No, let's don't." He was standing just behind her, looking out at the soft dusk.

They stepped outside and walked slowly down the path by the garden into the orchard where the peach blossoms showed their dim pink petals.

For the first time since he had known her, the Thinker felt bold, assured. He slipped his arm about her. He felt her body draw unreluctantly nearer his. He turned her about, face to face. He put both arms around her, and drew her into an embrace that filled his consciousness with a great cosmic flow of ecstasy.

They walked a long time in the dusk. They had loved each other from the beginning. They would be married very soon.

He told her about everything in his life except one—the offer of fifty thousand dollars for his land. Perhaps it was better not to tell her that at all, for he was going to refuse it.



Everybody Needs a Press Agent

by Miles Overholt

PUBLICITY IS MONEY—ESPECIALLY FOR A MOVIE ACTOR. THEREFORE DUG AND HIS BUDDY, MOVIE COW-PUNCHERS, HIRED A PRESS AGENT. BEFORE THEY WERE FINISHED WITH HIM HE LEARNED A FEW THINGS AND THEY LEARNED —A LOT. . . . . .

THERE was a good adding machine ruined when Dug Turner went into the movies. Yes, ma'am, Dug could figger out more ways to be what he wasn't than one of them chameleons.

We hadn't been doing all the heavy riding for the Ex-co Film Company—doubling for this hero of the films, Neal Newcomb, and one thing and another—for more than a couple of months till Dug began to work out plans whereby we could make ourselves known to the commonwealth as two of the greatest motion picture artists known to humanity.

"Nobody is going to pay any attention to us till we begin to figger in the public prints," Dug said to me one evening after he had read a fine story in the paper about how Neal Newcomb, the handsome leading man, et nothing but eggs and pie for breakfast.

"I ain't any good at figgering, especially in public," I said to Dug.

"So we got to get our names scattered around among those as being present," he went on. "We got to become well-known men about town."

"You ain't talking to me," I said "Me, I don't go about town. All the cellars," I told Dug, "are in the suburbs."

"What we need," he continued onward, "is a press agent."

"What for?" I asked. "Didn't we already join one pressing club? What's the idea of taking on another one when we only got two suits to our names? Besides," I said, "ain't anybody ever told you that clothes don't make the man?"

"Listen, foozle-face," said Dug, "a press agent is an agent of the press—a person who acts as a representative of newspapers or other periodicals—a guy that gets things into the papers about a guy for nothing."

"Oh, well, then," I said, "if it ain't going to cost anything, why, go ahead. I'm a regular spendthrift when it doesn't cost anything."

Dug sighed kind of softly, and then he remarked in a mournful tone:

"They say that in time a drop of water will wear away the hardest stone, but I'll bet that drop would still be bouncing off your bean a thousand years from now."

Which sounded kind of silly to me, but I didn't say anything, not wanting to hurt Dug's feelings.

Anyway, I got assessed fifteen dollars a week for this here press agent—which is along about what all free things cost me—and a red-headed near-human person by the name of Sam Scrimmins was what adhered himself to our pay roll.

But it just goes to show that I was right in my argument, as I nearly always am, because I would rather be right than be president. And by golly, I would rather be wrong than be vice-president, if anybody happens to ask you.

Because the very next day Abe Einstein, the manager of the Ex-co Film Company, sent out a mass of letters to the actors and cow-punchers and others calling attention to a new advertising scheme.

Abe's letter alleged that the company was going to pay ten cents apiece for every fan letter turned over to the auditing department, so they could check 'em over every week. The letter said that, after all, the fans decided the fate of a player, and that they were the best advertisers of a guy.

"So," the epistle finished, "it behooves every one to display versatility and personality before the camera, because they are the attributes which will bring in the letters."

"Didn't I tell you!" I said to Dug. "If you'd listen to me you could save a lot of money every few days," I said. "We don't need a press agent. That ain't the kind of publicity our boss wants us to have."

"If I would listen to you," answered Dug, "I would have had my ears worn off long ago. Have you got any letters from fans?"

"No," I said, "but I can get some."

"How?" he wanted to know.

"Write 'em," I answered in a gentlemanly manner. Which is what Dug and I started in to commence to begin to do.

Yes, ma'am, Dug and I, we sat up six nights hand-running, dashing off laudatory little epistles to ourselves on a second-hand typewriter which we rented by the week—being afraid to trust our hired man with the secret—and then we mailed 'em to ourselves at various times of day and at different mail boxes, which was by way of kidding ourselves.

They were a fine bunch of letters, too, all of them starting out differently, and ending up with periods and other remarks of a purely literary flavor. There were about one hundred and fifty of them asking for our pictures, and some of 'em begging piteously for a lock of our hair.

Yes, sir, they were as complimentary a lot of letters as I ever saw in a day's travel, and we regarded them as a credit to the film company which employed us. I did the dictating and Dug, he did the two-finger work on the typewriter, he having been more used to the two-finger movement than me, because I never was much of a drinking man, anyway. And then we addressed most of them by hand and in a childish manner, so's they would look more domestic or hand-finished.

They would bring us in only fifteen dollars for the week, but fifteen dollars is fifteen dollars these days. Only that wasn't our reason for acquiring so much mail. What we wanted to do was to show the company that we were a couple of popular actors, even though we had been lowly cow-punchers on old man Wortham's ranch in the Ruby Valley, Nevada, only a few months before. Also we had a morbid craving to show up this here film hero, Newcomb.

Ever since he had nearly beaten Dug and me into a couple pieces of walking hamburger during a scene in which the director told us to fight, why, we kind of hankered to begin making inroads into his reputation.

So we was proud of them one hundred and fifty personal notes from the loving motion-picture fans. We had a little argument with the postmaster be-

cause Dug alleged that he was holding out five letters on us, and Dug told him just what kind of a government failure he was.

And the postmaster came pretty nearly ruining us for life when he asked Dug how he knew he had five more letters coming.

"Mebbe," said the mail person, "Mebbe the parties didn't write 'em."

"Yeh—mebbe they didn't. Only I know they did," said Dug. "Wasn't we there at the time!"

"Well, then," said the postmaster, shaking his head like the argument was over, "if you was there why didn't the parties tell you what they wanted to at the time? Was it a deaf-and-dumb asylum?"

But before Dug could think up an answer I managed to get him outside where the government didn't have any jurisdiction, and we hurried on away from there.

When we tore those airy, fairy fan letters open carelesslike and threw them onto the table in Dug's dressing room in a reckless and abandoned manner—well, sir, they were a beautiful sight to behold. We received all of them in three days' time, and we figgered that we had beaten that guy Newcomb by anyway a hundred, and we were all set to prove it.

Just as soon as the auditor's office opened up we intended going over there, one at a time, and startle 'em a lot, being careful, however, to walk nonchalantly past Newcomb and the other stars with the letters draped about our arms and protruding from our pockets, boots, hats and other locations of capaciousness.

But, first wanting to show our red-headed press agent what popular and cultured gents he was getting into the papers, we called him up and asked him to come and get a peek at some purely personal literature.

Well, sir, we showed that there Scrimmins agent the letters and told him to read all of 'em he wanted to and enjoy himself; also to try and learn what kind of letters picture fans really write. He might need the information, we told him.

So he read eighteen or twenty of them, rapidly and intensely, his face growing more and more intelligent-looking as he continued to peruse each sparkling bit of literary talent displayed in 'em, and new freckles showing amongst his face where only nineteen or twenty were before. Finally, he laid 'em aside and said:

"Certainly a strange coincidence there—all those letters."

"Yeh—ain't it?" ventured Dug. "What is?"

"Every darn one of 'em spells 'Screen' with 'a'—'S-c-r-e-a-n,'" he said. The educated son of a gun!

That night while all the world was happy and gay, two sad and dejected gents might have been seen carrying a dark object down to the river and drowning it. Them two mournful persons were sinking a gunny sack full of well-typed fan letters, and fifteen dollars' worth of busted hopes.

"Anyway," said Dug next morning, "perseverance and good acting are bound to get their reward. You can't keep a good man down, and onward the course of empire takes its way, to say nothing," he said, "of a rolling stone gathering no moss whatever, and faint heart never won a bird in hand. Look here!"

It was indeed something worth the second or third look—a letter for me and one for Dug, and neither of us had written 'em. If we had written those two letters one of 'em would not have read like this:

To the biggest hunk of cheese in pictures:

You make me sick—you poor old hick;
I'd like to smash you with a brick.
You can't act and you can't ride—
Whoever said you could—just lied!

A FRIEND.

Nor would the second one have contained the same words of moment. Yes, ma'am, each letter read the same. "A Friend" didn't want to appear to be partial, I guess.

But we didn't turn them letters in to the auditor. We didn't really need the ten cents, anyway.

Red-headed Sam Scrimmins was having an awful time getting us into the papers, too. He said everything looked bright and gay, but so far he hadn't been able to convince no editor that Dug and I were rejuvenating the motion picture industry any to speak of.

"What youse fellows ought to do is to do something," he said. "Do something unusual that'll make a news item."

"We will if you will tell us what to do," Dug told Sam. "But if we do that what's the use of having you around? It'll get into the papers, anyway. Why don't you do it?"

"You ought to make a thrilling rescue of some dame in a runaway, or a fire or something," said Sam.

"There ain't anything like that handy," I volunteered, it being my turn to speak, anyway. "How you going to do any rescuing when there ain't anything anywheres to be afraid of?"

"Keep an eye out all the time," said Sam. "That's the way to get publicity. You never can tell—something is apt to happen any minute."

I was about to inform him that one of my eyes was pretty nearly out, anyway, it being the one that Neal Newcomb aimed at during the fight I was telling about, but I didn't want to discourage Sam.

We had to go to work in Newcomb's picture right then and we didn't have any time to make further plans toward holding down Sam's job for him.

But it goes to show that you never can tell.

Kitty Klare, who was Newcomb's leading woman, was back on the job after a couple of weeks' vacation and it didn't hurt our feelings a bit to be playing in the same scenes with her.

I wish I could think up a nice lot of round-cornered, hand-embroidered words to describe this here Kitty Klare with. It ought to be done because the screen doesn't near come up to it. Oh, she has eyes and hair and dimples and blushes and everything.

She spoke right out loud to Dug and me after the first day or two, and Newcomb kind of liked her, too. You could see that. He is the kind of a hombre that would. Still we didn't hold that against him.

I kind of expected her to look with a good deal of favor on me after I had doubled six or seven times for the hero of the films, me supposed to be pretty nearly his twin when it comes to looks, though I ain't none proud of it. But that's what they paid me extra money for, and I didn't kick out loud about my misfortune.

After I had ridden a bucking broncho all around the mulberry bush a few times, impersonating this here rocking-horse cow-puncher, I kind of hoped she would toss me a couple of dimpled smiles to sort of lend a little encouragement to the somber affair, but she seemed to be too busy with her surging forth or something.

"I hope that girl isn't falling for that four-flusher," Dug said to me between scenes. "She's too nice for a pretty boy like him who's afraid to muss up his clothes."

"We got to show her we're better men," I told Dug. "We got to be regular gents around her, never swearing or anything, and taking off our hats whenever we're in doubt, and wearing our best handkerchiefs when we're around her," I said. "Then as soon as she begins to cotton to one of us, why, we'll just naturally take her away from the hero."

And Dug and I, being kind of pals and orphans and one thing and another,

why, that is what we agreed to do. And it was well.

Little did we reck that there was going to be a show-down right soon. No, ma'am, we didn't reck hardly any till after we had called it a day and gone to our dressing rooms to kind of wash off what made us pretty.

Because, by the time I had my spurs two thirds off to change to my Sunday ones, why, somebody hollered "Fire!" I ran out and—well, sir—right in front of us above our heads in a row of ladies' dressing rooms was a blaze. Yes, indeed, I was keeping an eye out like Sam told us to.

The entire building seemed to be more or less wrapped up in flames of a damaging character, and nobody seemed to hanker any to go upstairs and see if mebbe any of the women were getting singed, or bobbed, or anything. That is, nobody but me. I went up there in my simple, retiring way because I thought I heard a female woman hollering for help, and to try and get me some well-deserved publicity.

Well, I heard it, all right. I heard that there Kitty Klare yelping because she was penned up in her lavender-scented room without any visible means of escape. So I went in and got her. I carried that there fainting girl person down the stairs at the risk of burning holes in my Sunday clothes, while the populace looked on and forgot to cheer.

It would have been a very discouraging affair from the hero's standpoint if I had not been carrying the object of a couple of guys' affections. But, that being the case, I didn't care if they did kind of hold out on me with the applause, so long as Sam Scrimmins was on the job to put the death-defying feat into the newspapers.

Well, sir, somebody directed me where to lay the half-unconscious heroine—there being plenty of that kind of directors handy, but few actors—and just as she went under for the next time, this here Kitty Klare muttered happily, while looking square into my more or less grim and determined face—she muttered, "Neal!"

Which caused me to drop her with what was pretty close to a dull thud and let her stay dropped.

There was a fine story in the morning papers about it. Yeh, it was a fine story, if you don't care what you say. The headlines were all I cared to learn by heart so's I could stand up and say 'em in company. These headlines said:

NEAL NEWCOMB, REEL HERO, PROVES REAL HERO, RESCUES HIS LEADING WOMAN FROM FLAMES!

Yes ma'am, that was a plenty. Just as she mistakened me for Newcomb, so had the company's press agent, which seemed to be the easiest part of that guy's work.

I didn't see Sam Scrimmins next day or there would have been one less red-headed person in the world for the reformers to save. I wanted to fire him right away, but Dug says it wasn't his fault. He said Sam was not expected to spend all his time hanging around our necks like a millstone for thirty dollars a week. So I had to let Newcomb get away with it. And I never saw a guy carry off heroic honors with greater ease. It didn't seem to worry him at all.

There it was—fire, heroine, rescue and everything, just like the press agent ordered—and because we look alike Newcomb got all the credit. It seemed like I was hired to double for him off the screen, too, whenever there was any heavy work to be done.

Which made me madder than ever at this here heroish Neal Newcomb and more determined to do something to show him up. Dug, he felt the same way about the matter, too, and when two guys get started together along one line that way, just try to stop 'em! Look at Haig & Haig!

And just to show that luck is never to be monkeyed with, why, we got a joint letter the very next day—not the kind of a letter you write in a joint, you know, but one of them real glowy, soothing sort of heart-thumping letters, which said:

DEAR BOYS: This is just a little note to tell you how much I admire you and to encourage you to keep up your good work as real actors. You are on the high road to success, and a certain party had better look to his laurels. Lovingly, K. K.

There wasn't any doubt about it—hardly. That sweet li'le letter was from Kitty Klare. Wasn't them her initials? Of course, the whole thing was written and signed with a typewriter, but lots of stars use machines, we argued.

So I took the letter and slept with it under my pillow half the night and Dug woke me up at midnight and took it under his pillow, and that is the way it went for eight days and nights. Finally, we matched for its exclusive use for a week and Dug won it, and when I got it back it was pretty nearly worn out.

You bet we didn't turn it into the auditing department. You wouldn't use a string of pearls for bait, would you?

We kind of noticed that Kitty kept her eyes on us a good deal after that, or anyway we thought so. But we didn't want to embarrass her none, so we acted as though she hadn't ever written to us, like she did, and we could see that she appreciated it, too.

Little Archibald Holden Clavering, who ought to be placed in a deep well somewhere with a cyclone jammed in at the top—this here boy actor had a part in the picture we were playing in. He was the orphan brother of Kitty, or something.

It was that kid's doings that got us into the pictures in the first place, he having got his dad to hire us so's we'd get beaten up by Newcomb that way, and we were afraid he would do us some more dirt. I never saw a kid with such a revengeful disposition. He just naturally didn't like Dug and me, that's what. But he seemed to have changed after he saw we wouldn't quit, following our licking by Newcomb in the picture that time. He acted right friendly after that.

Of course, he did manage to nail a few tacks into my saddle just before I had to ride old Steamboat, the well and unfavorably known outlaw hoss; and he was seen by Dug climbing off the roof of Miss Klare's dressing room—which is above and in front of ours—about two minutes before the fire started that time, but nobody would ever believe he would do anything wrong—nobody but Dug and me. But he was the son of the production manager and we didn't dast say a word.

So I remarked to this here untamed youth, I said, "Well, old scout, you haven't been killing many injuns lately, have you?"

"Naw, but that don't mean I ain't doin' a lot of figgerin'," he answered, haughty. "Some o' these days I'm gonna bust out an' show youse guys what a real bad man can do, once he gets started."

"No!" I yiped. "Surely you ain't going to make no trouble around this here peaceful place, are you?"

"It ain't gonna be any trouble for me," said Archibald. "All the trouble," he said, "will be on the other foot."

"I hope you don't go and kill off a mess of innocent people," I told him, looking pained. "Especially women and children," I said.

"I don't war on no women," he said, proudlike. "I'm a man's man!"

And he being eleven or ten years of age, I could see right away that he meant what he said.

You see, the little cuss had run away once and had come to old man Wortham's ranch in Nevada, and we found him and turned him over to his folks, after he had darn near disrupted the

entire State. That is why he was kind of sore on us, I guess.

Archibald had picked out for his special chums two of the worst-looking cow-punchers I ever had to look into the faces of. They had come from Arizona somewheres, but they were "types," and Sam Herrold, Newcomb's director, seemed to want 'em in all of his pictures. I guess it was because they looked so much like regular bandits; also, I reckon, that is why Archibald chummed with 'em. That kid certainly was cut out for a wild, untamed terror of the plains.

Whenever there was a rest of a few hours between scenes; waiting for sets to be put up, or something, why, little Archibald and them two roughnecks would straddle their horses and beat it down to the lower end of the company's ranch and shoot at a mark, or swap yarns, or discuss the slickest methods of committing murder, and they seemed to enjoy themselves first rate.

But around his parents Archibald was a perfect little gentleman. He used the finest-talking language I ever heard outside of an introductory speech indorsing some political candidate at a convention, and his mother called him her little hero. Which Archibald figgered he was.

Anyway, it looked like Dug and I were the only ones who really knew the kid, we having been thrown together with him on Old Man Worcham's ranch for nearly a month.

But we were mistaken. Somebody else knew him, it appeared. Because we got another joint letter, which kind of surprised us, it having been shoved under our dressing-room door without a regular stamp on it, or anything, and it was written by hand on pink paper. It said:

You are the only ones to whom I dare appeal in this crisis, and I hope you will say nothing to anybody about this note. I am afraid for little Archibald with those two rough men. I overheard them discussing plans for committing a crime, and I am afraid the little fellow will be drawn into it. Will you please watch them—and little Archibald.

That was all, but it was enough to excite us for a while.

"Little Archibald *drawn* into it! That's good!" said Dug. "I'll bet little Archibald is the whole show. He leads —others follow."

Then he said: "I'll bet little Archibald wrote that letter himself. He's always up to some trick like that. He's trying to get us into trouble, that's all."

"That ain't any way to get us into trouble—watching him." I argued. "The only way he can slip anything over on us is when we ain't watching him."

Anyway, we decided to keep an eye on the little rascal when he wasn't looking to see if he were. Which we did.

We made it a point to kind of hang around where those other two roughnecks were, but nothing came of it. They acted just like anybody else, even if they didn't look like it.

And all this time we were doing our best to show Kitty that we were much finer gents than this here Newcomb, which wasn't an easy job, because he had been in pictures a long time and had got some graceful training, like eating with a fork and trimming his nails and never looking into the camera.

But Kitty seemed to kind of avoid us all of a sudden.

"It's because she's modest about writing that there sweet letter," said Dug, who was carrying it in his shirt pocket that week next to his heart along with his smoking tobacco.

"What we ought to do is to go and tell her we appreciate it," I said, "like real gents would do, and relieve her of any embarrassment."

"What if she didn't write it!" Dug looked scared for a minute. "Mebbe somebody faked her initials that way," he went on, excited. "Or mebbe them wasn't her initials. There's lots of

folks with K. K. for initials—Kaptain Keith, or Ku Klux or Kolin Kelly, or any number of persons."

"Don't be foolish among the head," I said to Dug. "Ain't she the only K. K. that knows us?"

"Just the same I'd like to know for sure," Dug argued. "I don't want to be carrying some other guy's letter this way."

"Well, gosh! let's ask her then!" I yiped. "What's the use of worrying over a little matter like that!"

So that then was the sense of the meeting.

We saw her coming to her dressing room that evening and we stopped her, the two of us together. We took off our hats like a couple of well-raised gents and bowed low to her, and I said to her, I said:

"Pardon us—me and Dug—Miss Klare, but did you—was it you—or not that wrote to us—me and Dug, here—did you——"

"He wants to know," said Dug, "did you write us a kind of a—a——"

"A letter?" I finished.

"Yeh—a letter," accented Dug.

"Uh-huh—a letter," I gargled.

Well, sir, right away we wished we hadn't said it so sudden and prompt that way, because she turned into one solid mass of blush, and looked down and all around her, scaredlike. She kind of stammered, and then she said: "Yes—but please don't tell any one, will you?"

"No, ma'am!" we both darn near yelled together, and she ran past us and upstairs and into her dressing room without looking back.

Yes, sir, she had done it! That girl was stuck on both of us and we hadn't been there three months!

It just went to show, we said, how the women take to two gents who try to behave theirselves and act like they wasn't raised in a barn.

I won the letter for that night, matching Dug two best out of three in order to show that luck was with me, and it looked like mebbe I was the favored one with Kitty in spite of the handicap of looking like her leading man, Neal Newcomb.

But looks, as I said to Dug later, don't make the man. You've got to have whatever you're worth inside of you. Of course, looking like Neal Newcomb so's I could double for him in the tight places made me worth twenty-five dollars a week more than Dug to the company, but it didn't swell me up none. I'm just as democratic as anybody when it comes to that.

Our press agent, Sam Scrimmins, came over to the lot next day with a scheme to get us into the papers.

"What you ought to do," he said, "is to catch a murderer."

"Where is one?" asked Dug.

"There ain't any to-day, but there is every once in a while," answered Sam.

"Well, how we going to know when somebody is about to be murdered, or even afterward?" I complained. "You can think up the hardest things for a guy to do. It looks like we were going to have to be mind readers, too, as well as first-class actors if we're going to get anywhere in this business."

"They don't advertise 'em in the papers before they happen, do they?" Dug asked, sarcasticlike.

"I don't know how you're gonna do it, but it ought to be done," Sam said. "Go on and think it over," he said, as he took his departure and thirty dollars in money.

After which it occurred to me that he never seemed to mention any wild schemes of his until he was all ready to collect his weekly money. He was just trying to show us he was looking after our interests, I guess, and that he was full of ideas, if only the darn things would work.

This here picture acting takes you into the strangest places, doesn't it?

Being a movie actor without any visible means of sport, what with working overtime and Sundays, makes hustling for jack a dull joy.

During that week Sam Herrold went out into the swell-home section and got permission to take a lot of scenes in one of the grandest houses I ever scuffed up the furniture in. It was supposed to be the home of a rich cowman who had come to town and built his bride a million-dollar home. Kitty Klare was the bride and Neal Newcomb was the rich cattle baron.

Sam announced to us that after we had finished them scenes we was going to rob a bank. Yes, ma'am, he went and made arrangements with a hick institution out in the suburbs a ways to shoot a lot of scenes during the middle of the day so's there would be plenty of light inside the bank. Half a dozen of us were to do the holdupping and another gang of us was to chase the bandits and kill off a number of 'em. Neal Newcomb was to get all the credit.

Looking out of the left-hand corner of my long-distance, or never-miss-'em eye, I saw this here Pete Gibbons and "Curley" Lewis, them two bad-looking roughnecks—chums of Archibald—I saw them two parties signal each other, and then they slipped out, one at a time, while we were waiting for Sam to get ready for the next scene. Dug and I, we sneaked over to a window and hid behind some high-priced curtains and listened to them bandits talk to each other just under the window, where they thought nobody would hear 'em.

"The kid's got a head on 'im, at that," Gibbons was saying. "It'll be the easiest thing we ever pulled t' go back there an' tell th' cashier we gotta take a coupla scenes which was balled up."

"Sure," answered Curley Lewis. "An' nobody will suspect we are anybody else but movies—even th' clerks will put their mitts up jus' t' be accommodatin'."

"But we can't take th' kid," said Gibbons. "We'd hafta take 'im away with us an' he'd be in th' way, an' mebbe get us ketched."

"No, we'll jus' tell 'im we can't get away, or somethin', an' then go pull off th' job an' beat it," answered Curley Lewis.

"When we get back t' th' lot we'll jus' nachelly get our own broncs an' fade away," Gibbons said. "There'll be plenty o' time t' get th' coin and beat it before the bank closes."

"Easy," grunted Lewis, and that is all we could hear, because Sam Herrold called, "Camera!" and, anyway, we had all the information we needed which is more than we really wanted, if you'd drive up in a truck and ask me.

Whoever wrote us knew what he was talking about, all right. You bet somebody had better keep an eye on that darn' kid. Here he was inciting a bank robbery right on the lot. Of course he would know about taking scenes in that bank before the rest of us, his dad being production manager that way.

I knew them two guys were just plain desperadoes. You can always tell, can't you! They didn't act anything like Dug and me.

Well, sir, we worried a good deal about the matter that night. Something had to be done. Even our own press agent would have said that. But what? That was the mooted question. I propounded it to myself six hundred consecutive times, and then tried it on Dug. What?

We couldn't go to the sheriff or a policeman or anybody like that, because we couldn't prove anything. We had to do whatever had to be done without making it a public matter.

"Besides," said Dug, "remember what Sam Scrimmins told us. Mebbe we can catch a murderer, or prevent one, or something."

Dug kind of gets excited once in a while. Of course, that was just what

Sam Scrimmins told us to do. Even if they wasn't murderers they were robbers, and to capture them would be nearly as important.

Then we had to go and worry ourselves a lot more about how to accomplish this here brave deed. It had to be handled with a care—use no hooks and all of that. Yes, sir, we had to do more planning than the robbers themselves. Which ain't fair, it seems to me. We knew there wasn't going to be any chance for a retake this time.

So we sat up till nearly morning wrassling with that there problem in finance and treachery and heroism and, finally, we got it all figgered out.

We decided to say nothing and act as if everything was all right. Then when we got back to the lot we were going to keep a couple of eyes on them bandits, and as soon as they started for their horses we were going to beat it back to the bank, hide ourselves and wait till they started in to rob it, and then we would step out and grab 'em all neat and nifty.

"I guess that will make some story," said Dug, proudlike. "We got to tell one person in advance, though—Sam Scrimmins."

"Yes," I answered, "we don't want Newcomb to get the credit this time."

Little Archibald Holden Clavering was visiting among them two outlaws the next morning like they was a couple of long-lost relatives, and we could see all three of them talking low together, though neither one of us could get close enough to hear anything. We didn't want to act suspicious and, besides, we knew more than most detectives know when they start out on robbery cases like that.

Kitty Klare didn't pay any attention to us, somehow. She seemed to have changed her mind about us, or something, and acted like she was trying to make a hit with them two outlaws. Ain't women the funniest things?

She never seemed to take her eyes off'n them bandits all day, especially after we got down to Ocean City where the bank holdup was to be staged.

She wasn't in the bank scenes, but she went along, riding in Newcomb's car, along with Sam Herrold and Archibald. Which, if you ask me, was poor judgment.

Pete Gibbons and Curley Lewis and four other mean-looking hombres were to do the robbing, and Neal Newcomb, the hero, and Dug and I and some other punchers were to come riding up and chase 'em off, and kill a couple of 'em with our blank cartridges. Two of Pete's gang were practicing up at making falls, they being the ones that were to be killed.

The cashier and his hired men seemed to enjoy the picture first rate. There were three of them in the bank, and Sam Herrold got them to put up their hands in front of all that money and look scared like regular actors such as Dug and me.

Well, sir, we rehearsed the scene in the bank a couple of times, and I never saw anybody act more natural in my life than Pete Gibbons and Curley Lewis. Why, Sam Herrold almost raised their wages, they were that good at acting bank robbers. They appeared to know just what to say and where to stand and how to scoop the money into the sacks which Sam had brought along, and how to handle their six-guns so's they wouldn't be in the way, like they had had years of hard practice.

In a minute Sam Herrold, he yelled, "Camera!" and the robbers went to robbing and when they came out of the bank us punchers, with Newcomb in the lead, went tearing in after 'em and it took six cameramen to get it all.

Nobody was hurt much, except Hank Myers, one of the fall guys whose horse forgot his lines and got up too quick, but that didn't make any difference. We got the picture, didn't we?

Dug and I, we kept watching Gibbons and Curley Lewis while they were being rehearsed there in the bank, and you could see their eyes taking in every little detail so's there wouldn't be any mix-up when the robbery came off.

And as soon as we got back to the studio, Dug and I, we asked Sam Herrold could we be excused now, and he wanted to know what was the idea.

"We're sick," I told him. "Something we et, I guess," I said.

"I got to send a telegram," alibied Dug. "A friend of mine is dead and I got to ouija him."

"We don't need you for the next scenes, anyway," Sam said. "All you fellows that were in the posse are through for the day."

Which made it kind of handy for us. So we hired a car outside and started on our journey of rescue and succor.

But first we walked through the auditor's office so they could see it was us instead of Newcomb and somebody that was going away from there. We wanted 'em to know who it was that was going around the country preventing bank robberies, and rescuing women from fires, and the like.

Then we drove over to Sam Scrimmins' office and told him all about it and for him to get the story correct for the papers. And our hired man, he said he would do it.

He wanted to go along and get some of the publicity himself, but we wouldn't take him. It was our game and we wasn't going to give some cheap outsider one end of it.

"The main point for you to think about," I told him, "is that Neal Newcomb ain't doing any of this here robbery preventing."

"I getcha," said Sam. "Mr. Newcomb, it would appear, has been getting away with the persimmons. The green-eyed monster," said Sam, "has went and bit you and Dug in a couple of vital spots, I take it."

"You speak," I said, "in griddles. What's a fairy story got to do with you holding your job?"

"I can make myself plainer," said Sam.

"Not with the same face you're wearing at the present moment of time," I told him.

"I wonder," he mused, his freckles glistening in the sunlight like a gulch full of condensed-milk cans, "I wonder if we couldn't frame up a vendetta."

"A what?" Dug wanted to know.

"Don't you know what a vendetta is?" asked Sam.

"Sure," I answered. "It looks like a piece of string and it tastes like one—with pepper on it."

"You mean spaghetti," corrected Dug. "But, at that, I guess there isn't much difference."

"Well, I was wondering," went on our press agent, foolishly, "if we couldn't get up a vendetta story for you and Dug—you two against Newcomb."

"No, we can't," said Dug. "That is, you can't—and live happy ever afterward."

"Why not?" wondered Sam.

"Because it's a private affair," answered Dug. "We aim to continue to be gentlemen despite our associations, and gents don't go and publish private affairs that way."

Which showed that Dug was kind of in earnest about this here Newcomb matter. And right away I knew it was all on account of Kitty. Also, after that speech of his, I decided to let him have her, making myself a regular martyr to love in less time than it takes to tell it.

With the car we knew we could beat the two robbers to the bank by an hour or two, so we took it easy getting there. We was on hand about two o'clock and the bank didn't close till four, so we had plenty of time getting our plans all worked out.

The cashier couldn't hardly seem to believe what we was talking about when we told him what them two bandits had made up their minds to do to him. He seemed to think we was joshing him, or something.

But after Dug explained that we were there to prevent the robbery and to capture them two outlaws at one and the same time, why he began to kind of get the idea, it looked like.

"Now, then, our plan is for you to hide us back there behind the money counter," said Dug. "We will keep ourselves hid till they come in and order you to throw up your hands, which will be the caper for you to do."

"But they might grab the money and run," argued the cashier. "Then what?"

"That's where we get 'em," Dug answered. "As soon as they start to reach for the coin, why, then we bust out and nab 'em."

"Wait a minute." said the cashier, a funny look coming into his financial eyes. "I'll see what my assistant says."

So he and another scared person went into a back room, while another one of them kept an eye on the money at the window, and, finally, the cashier came back alone and said it was O. K.

"Come right back here," he said, opening a funny gate.

We went back there and sat down on the floor and talked in low guttural tones to ourselves, while the bankers proceeded about their regular business of making money, just as though a large incident of great moment wasn't about to transpire before their very eyes.

I guess we must have roosted there in that painful position for an hour talking in a subdued sort of manner, and then:

"Sh! Here they come!" said Dug, getting his six-gun ready.

We listened, and sure enough it sounded like them. Heavy footsteps could be heard coming into the front door—about three men, we figgered. We wondered if, after all, Archibald had come along, but we decided to keep quiet till the holdup began.

The cashier stepped to the window and somebody said something we couldn't understand, and then he went and opened the little gate again, and them three men walked right back to where we was hiding ourselves!

We got our guns all ready for active business. Then we heard the cashier say in a harsh tone of voice:

"Here they are—all ready for you, Sheriff!"

And then Dug and I, we looked up into the biggest and most terrifying gun muzzles we ever dodged!

"Why—wha-what's this!" Dug managed to gasp, my gasper not being in working order. "What's the big stunt, if any?" he wanted to know.

"You two eggs are under arrest," said the sheriff. "Lay down them guns and stand up and let us have a nice long look at you," he said.

"Didja think you could get away with that rough stuff here in this town, you poor dumb-bells?" went on that there gentlemanly peace officer, taking our guns.

"What do you mean—rough stuff?" bridled Dug. "We're preventing a robbery. Now you've probably spoiled the whole thing."

"It sounds like a very good joke, but that is as far as it goes with me," said the sheriff. "Come on," he said, "we're going by-by."

So, without any apology or anything for sending his assistant out to call the sheriff's office while we were waiting there to do him a favor and save the bank's wealthy money, why, the cashier let us go with them rough sheriffs straight to the county jail.

It was in this here jail that Sam Scrimmins found us.

"Listen," he spoke up as soon as he saw us. "that ain't the way to get pub-

licity—by going to jail. You ought to have let me pulled it for you. Now you've balled the whole thing up. If I had been there——"

"Shut up!" broke in Dug. "You're here, ain't you! How are you going to get us out? That's what we want to know."

"They'll be down in a minute," said Sam. "I was coming to that. I fixed it, but it was a hard job. I don't know but I ought to get a raise in salary for this day's work."

"How did you do it?" asked Dug, brightening for the first time since we started out on our career of crime.

"Oh, I told 'em the truth about you," said Sam. "I always do. They said they couldn't believe two grown-up men could be such blamed fools, but I told 'em you were, all right. So they're going to let you out on your own recognizance, seeing that nothing happened."

Which was done.

Sam somehow managed to keep the story out of the papers, and we went back to the studio without anybody knowing what had taken place among two of their well-known actors.

As soon as we could do it without creating any suspicion, we asked if Gibbons and Curley Lewis were still there, and they were. It seems that they had to work in the scenes which didn't need Dug and me, and they must have been afraid to pull out and leave when they knew they would be looked for right away. And Sam Herrold has got an eagle eye.

It is just just little things that big events hang onto.

Anyway, that's the way Dug explained the reason for them not holding up the bank, like they promised they would. Darn 'em!

But I ain't any too sure that little Archibald Holden Clavering didn't frame the whole thing just to get us into trouble. It would be just like him. He certainly has got the brains for figgering out unusual and devious methods of torture.

I saw him next day.

"Didja get my letter?" he asked, like a scorpion might say, "Good morning."

"No, what letter?" I inquired.

"The one I wrote with po'try in it," he answered. "I wrote one t' you an' another'n jus' like it t' Dug."

"No, I didn't get mine," I lied. "But I get so many fan letters I can't remember 'em all," I yawned.

"I bet you remember that'n signed K. K." He grinned, like a rattlesnake in the grass.

"Why?" I asked him.

"Because you thought it was from Kitty Klare," he said, grinning twice in the same place.

"Did you write that one, too?" I inquired.

"Course, you fathead," answered the little gentleman. "I wanted t' see how you'd act—like th' darn fool I knowed you was," he said, throwing his dad's sharpest knife at the company cat.

Which proved to me that Kitty Klare was the person who wanted us to keep a watch on little Archibald and the two bad men he was chumming with. She's the one who wrote that pink letter, of course. She admitted she wrote one—and Archibald wrote the other, or affectionate, one.

But it is still worrying me a lot as I deftly and diligently try to figger it out—did Kitty mean for us to be heroes, or are she and Archibald a pair of cutups, trying to get us into trouble as the days go by?

But, anyway, Dug still wears that letter under his pillow. I never had the heart to tell him it wasn't from Kitty—not after he showed he was so het up in his affections.

But I'm glad he's sleeping on that note of Archibald's. Mebbe he will dream up some way to murder the little cuss without having to go to some quiet place and serve time for it.

Cave Man

by C. C. Waddell

Author of "Smiler's Tenth Chance," "A Feast of Treason," etc.

"SMILER" FOSTER HAD A VIOLENT DETESTATION FOR ALL EMANCIPATED YOUNG WOMEN OF THE FLAPPER TYPE. CONSEQUENTLY, WHEN HE DREW THE TASK OF TEACHING HIS BOSS' DAUGHTER—WHO CAME UNDER THIS HEADING—TO DRIVE HER NEW CAR, THE ASTUTE YOUNG CHAUFFEUR WAS THOROUGHLY DISGUSTED. BUT WITH THE CASE OF HIS EMPLOYER'S SECRETARY—THAT WAS A DIFFERENT MATTER; ENTIRELY DIFFERENT, AS WAS PROVED BY THE WEIRD RESULTS!

CLUTCH down; foot off the gas. Clutch up; feed her the gas."

"Smiler" Foster intoned this as a sort of chanting accompaniment, while the bob-haired neophyte beside him wrestled the steering wheel and zigzagged the little car jerkily down the street.

The bob-haired neophyte was the daughter of Dr. Herschel Sprague, famous New York surgical specialist, and when by various feminine wiles she had cajoled her crusty parent into giving her a car—a nifty, little raceabout for her very own, and which she was to drive herself—as a present on her eighteenth birthday, Smiler, the doctor's more-or-less-trusted chauffeur, was naturally elected to the job of instructing her in its management.

He did not view the assignment with any high degree of enthusiasm. Women drivers, with their utter disregard of signals and henlike scuttering across the road, were the bane of his existence; and to aid in adding even one to their number seemed to him a species of treachery to his craft.

Also, there were other reasons.

"'Tain't enough," he complained to a sympathetic circle at the garage, "that doc, the old crab, has wished this kid onto me to learn her what it's all about, but on top of that he ain't took my advice on what bus to buy, no more'n if I was Joe, the furnace man.

"'If you're looking for a nice car for Miss Beatrix, doctor,' I says, 'your best buy is a Fargo sport roadster. Light, and easy handled, and nothin' to get out of order. What you might call a regular lady's car, and yet classy enough for anybody. Yes, sir; the Fargo is sure the trick for you. Don't let nobody steer you onto nothing else.'

"And, dog my cats, if the old fathead didn't turn right around, and put in his order for a Vimplus Eight raceabout! Simply because some Reggie or Percy what Trixie knowed, told her that a Vimplus Eight was what she ought to have."

The garage owner who happened to be one of the audience gave a challenging snort.

"Where do you get that fathead stuff?" he growled. "I call doc a pretty wise old bird, myself. Everybody knows that a Vimplus has it all over a Fargo, any way you check up."

"Is that so?"—scathingly. "Well, let me tell you there's one point where no

car's got it over a Fargo—and it's a point what counts a whole lot with me. Ain't nobody more liberaler'n the Fargo folks when it comes to paying a commission, but you couldn't pry a cent off'n them Vimplus tightwads with a crowbar. I know, 'cause I tried it.

"Anyhow," he sought to justify himself, "what business has a crazy flapper fooling with a ninety-horse-power engine like's in the Vimplus? As I says to doc: 'If you get her that boat,' I says, 'you'll be makin' both of us accessory to a murder before the fact.' But he only sniffs unconcernedlike, and tells me to drive him down to the hospital for a operation. Murder don't mean nothing in his young life, you see. It's a trade custom, as you might say."

But, although he did not speak of it, there was an even stronger basis for Smiler's objection to his new task, and this was Beatrix herself.

From one cause and another it had been two years since he had last seen the doctor's daughter. The first of those years she had spent on a school trip abroad. During the second, there had been—due to a disagreement with the doctor over a bill of repairs—a hiatus in Smiler's connection with the Sprague establishment, which happened to coincide with Beatrix's visits home.

Two years makes quite a bit of difference when one is in the teens. Smiler remembered Beatrix as a shy, gawky schoolgirl content to ride demurely on the rear seat of the limousine. When he found that the pupil foisted on him was a young woman of the ultra-modern, sophisticated type, he instinctively shied.

"Watch your step, bo!" he communed with himself. "Somep'n about us chauffeurs makes all the dames fall for us. Bet a cookie that there flapper'll be after me like a man-eating hyena soon's we're out in the car together. And if doc ever suspicioned there was anything like a petting party 'twixt me and his little Trixie, my job'd last just long enough for him to tie a can to me."

Smiler's estimate of feminine susceptibility was no idle boast, but justified by both his observation and experience. There does seem for the fair—particularly the very young among them, and those on the shady side of forty—an unaccountable fascination about chauffeurs. The trim Norfolk jacket and puttees and the visored cap exercise for them much the same attraction as the khaki of the soldier and the swaggering blue of the gob and, like Desdemona, they listen enthralled to tales of moving accidents by flood and field, and of hairbreadth 'scapes from being taken by that insolent foe, the motor-cycle cop.

Accordingly, when Smiler started out to give his first lesson to Beatrix, he sat on guard, very austere and unbending, on his side of the car, eyes straight ahead and answering her chatter of questions with curt monosyllables.

The schoolroom chosen was a broad, quiet street just off Van Cortlandt Park; bathed in the morning sunlight, empty of vehicles as an untraveled village lane.

Arriving here, Smiler stepped out of the car and with a jerk of the head directed the girl to move over into his vacant seat. Then, after a brief instruction in the simple mechanism of automobile control, the gas and spark levers, the self-starter, accelerator, clutch, gear shift, and transmission and emergency brakes and still never once glancing at her, he got in on the other side and told him to take the wheel and start off.

With little buck-jumps and uncertain veerings, the Vimplus Eight moved away, traveled about ten feet, and stalled. Smiler patiently repeated his instructions, maintaining the same air of detachment, and told her to try again.

This time they had covered about half a block, when Beatrix in attempting to

shift gears started the engine to racing so hard that it threatened to burst out of the hood.

With rigid self-control, Smiler pointed out the error she had made, and coldly bade her proceed.

Wavering and wabbling, with gears grating and engine emitting strange noises, the car meandered three or four blocks. Then at a suggestion from Smiler to turn, it swung about in a wide, irregular half-circle and came back to the starting point.

For an hour and a half this was kept up, Beatrix clinging with a stiff death-grip to the wheel and punctuating the lesson with flapper profanity and exclamations of chagrin at her frequent mistakes, while Smiler for her guidance steadily chanted his runic: "Clutch down, foot off the gas."

Gradually, though, she began to get the hang of the thing. The car no longer reeled drunkenly from curb to curb, but followed a reasonably straight line. The nerve-racking grating of the gears occurred less frequently. Smiler ceased grabbing continually at the emergency brake, and permitted himself to lean back.

Perhaps the warm sunshine and the monotonous lullaby repetition of his refrain dulled his usually alert senses and caused him to relax his vigilance. The strain, too, of holding his head so steadily eyes-front was a bit wearing. Smiler dropped his lids for a moment, and allowed himself to nod. The girl was really doing very nicely now, and with the wide street all to themselves, what could happen?

It was at this juncture that Beatrix, emboldened by her success, grew contemptuous of the staid ten-mile gait which Smiler had enjoined, and decided to speed up a little. Experimentally she pushed down on the accelerator, and her foot, as yet uneducated to the delicate gradations of pressure whereby the flow of gas is increased, made it snappy.

The Vimplus Eight leaped forward under the stimulus like a spirited horse at a stroke of the lash, and Beatrix, surprised and a bit frightened at the sudden response to her maneuver, lost her head.

Involuntarily she pressed down harder than ever on the button under her foot, and the raceabout's ninety horse-power awaking to action began to get busy. The speedometer indicator leaped from ten to twenty, to thirty, to forty.

In a panic, the girl abandoned any attempt to guide or control the car. Everything she had learned about it that morning seemed wiped from her mind as with a wet sponge. Apparently the only move she was capable of making was to keep jamming down on the accelerator; and this by some perverse prompting she continued to do.

Like a rudderless ship in a typhoon, the Vimplus tore down the street, yawing wildly from side to tide. And at that moment a two-year-old child playing on the sidewalk about a block ahead toddled out into the roadway.

It was all over in a split second. The raceabout, as if guided by some malign hand, swooped toward the child straight as a hawk for its prey. Smiler, roused from his lethargy by the increased momentum of the car, yet with his faculties still scattered, sat seemingly dazed in the face of the impending tragedy.

Then, as a shrill scream broke through Beatrix's white lips, he suddenly came to his senses. His left arm shot out to seize the wheel and give it a sharp twist to port, while with his right hand he clicked off the ignition, and jerking the gear lever into neutral, reached for the brake.

Impossible to stop in time when under such headway, he knew, but he went through the motions automatically. His one hope was that he might shift their direction enough to miss the child. And he did. They grazed by the unobservant

and preoccupied kid with not more than an inch to spare.

Then, as the car under his manipulation came to a halt, Smiler turned to the trembling girl beside him. Nothing remote or aloof about his attitude now.

"Ya' damn' bonehead!" he blazed out at her, as a vent for his own perturbed feelings. "Whatcha think you are, a second Barney Oldfield? Always the way with you damn' amachoors. No sooner get your hands on a steering wheel, than you start out wanting to be speed demons."

"I—I couldn't stop it," stammered the girl apologetically. "It just kept going faster and faster."

"Course you couldn't stop it, with that silver-buckled dog of your'n grindin' down on the 'celerator like you was tryin' to drive it clean through the chassis. Why didn't you take your clumsy hoof off'n the gas? Couldn't stop it, hey?"—disgustedly. "What's your brakes for? What's your clutch for? What's your gear shift for? Ain't nothing I drilled into you this morning made no impression? I stopped her easy enough, didn't I? Why, if it hadn't 'a' been for me, you'd be on your way to the homicide court right now, with mebbe twenty years a-staring you in the face."

Only pausing for breath, he launched into another tirade against the murderous recklessness of those who were willing to entrust a piece of powerful machinery into the heedless hands of feather-brained nitwits; at the same time paying his respects to the stupidity, incompetence and lack of consideration of women as drivers and in general.

But his flow of invective suddenly checked and faltered. In the interval that had elapsed, Beatrix had recovered something of her shaken poise, and now as he glared at her savagely he saw that her pale cheeks had taken on a tinge of color and that she was drinking in his words with upraised face and parted lips.

"Oh," she breathed, with an almost adoring gleam in her wide, blue eyes, "what a beautiful bawling out! Priceless! I thought you were just a graven image like old Samuels, the butler. But you are really virile and primitive and brutal. That is what women most yearn for, don't you think?"—with an ecstatic wriggle. "To be treated as the dirt beneath a strong man's feet!"

Smiler choked in ineffectual exasperation. What was there to do or say, with a creature like that? All his caution and good resolutions had gone for naught. As with Job in the Bible, the thing he greatly feared had come upon him. Next he knew, the bold hussy would be cuddling over him and snuggling her cheek down against his shoulder.

"Lesson's over for to-day," he managed to numble, and leaped precipitately from the car, so that she might move over and give him the driver's seat.

He watched her warily on the drive home, lest she attempt any further overtures, and pretended to be absorbed in a fictitious pounding of the engine which, he explained, required all his attention.

But it was not until he had her out of the car, and saw her vanish into the house with a little intimate wave of the hand which sent cold shivers of apprehension chasing up and down his spine, that he was able to draw a really free breath. Then, locking the car, he staggered weakly into the doctor's office.

"Just my luck," he grumbled, when informed by Miss Kenzie, the secretary, that Dr. Sprague was not in. "I was figuring on getting him to give me a prescription for a pint of booze, and downing the whole of it. I sure need a stimulant if anybody ever did."

"Why, what's the matter?" inquired Miss Kenzie. "Are you ill?"

"Ill?" Smiler mopped a perspiring brow. "I'd ruther have typhoid fever and 'pendicitis and double pneumonia piled on me all at once, 'n what I went through. I tell you, I'm all shot to pieces. If doc wants that there baby vamp of his learned to drive a car, he's got to pick on somebody else beside me. I'll quit my job first. Of all the brazen, shameless tidbits that ever——

"Thanks." He interrupted himself to drain the reviving draught which Miss Kenzie extracted from the doctor's medicine closet and presented to him. "That sure touches the spot. Trust old doc not to have any bootlegger's cut stuff around. All the same, he needn't think he can sic that Trixie on me again. If I ever take another skirt out to learn her how to drive, I hope I carbonize."

"Oh, Foster, don't say that." She gave him a reproachful look. "I'm getting a little car myself right away, and I was definitely counting on you to teach me how to handle it. So, when you say that no more women need apply——"

"But you ain't no woman, Miss Kenzie," Smiler hurriedly broke in. "That is—— What I mean"—blundering worse than ever—"you ain't one of the kind that sets a man goofy, like this now Cleopatra done with Antony. You've got sense, even if you wouldn't take no prize in a bathing-beauty contest. Yes, sir; I'm for you, no matter if you have went nutty like all the other frails with this yen to drive a car."

It was not only the drink she had given him, that warmed Smiler's heart to this flattering tribute. He honestly liked Miss Kenzie. Of all the people in Doctor Sprague's *ménage,* she was the only one who had his entire approval. With her smooth, shining hair, and trim neatness of dress, her intelligence, efficiency and dependability, she reminded him of some high-powered, noiseless-working motor-engine. "Little Twin-six," was his private name for her. And she could be a good friend, too. On more than one occasion, by her tact and diplomacy, she had saved him from an explosion of the doctor's touchy temper.

"And I'll tell you"—with a manifest struggle—"seeing that it's you, Miss Kenzie, I won't draw no hard-and-fast color line this time. Honestly, 'twon't seem like pestering if a woman tries to learn. You ain't so dumb, I guess, but what I could beat the essentials into your bean; and, if I do, mebbe you won't go wrapping yourself around a telegraph pole so quick as you would otherwise. Besides, which is more important, I'd feel plumb safe with you. It'd sure be a laugh to think of you trying any flirting, hey? So, whenever you're ready, sister, just tip me the high sign, and I'll be on the job. Did you say, that you had got your car yet?"

"No; although I am practically sold on a Fargo roadster."

"A Fargo!"—disparagingly.

"Yes, it comes in such a pretty color. And then I heard you recommending it to the doctor so highly, that I made up my mind to look no further."

"Ye-es. I see." Smiler swallowed hard. "Well, to tell you the truth, Miss Kenzie, my opinions has changed some in regards to the Fargo since I was talking to doc. Color don't amount to nothing. It's the engine that counts in a motor car. And the Fargo engine ain't exzackly—well, it ain't exzackly—— Aw, hell! If you must know, Miss Kenzie, I was just stringing doc along to get a commission. That there Fargo car ain't nothing but a tin can.

"Now, if you really want a bus," he urged persuasively, "you take my advice and get yourself a Vimplus Eight, same's what doc picked for Beatrix."

"Oh, but that would come to a higher price than I can afford to pay," she protested.

"Forget it." Smiler dismissed the

objection with a contemptuous wave of his hand. "You leave that end of it to me. I'll get you a Vimplus a hundred dollars cheaper'n what you'd pay for your Fargo junk. A used car of course, but as good a bargain as I ever seen. Better'n a bran'-new car for that matter, 'cause it's been broke in. Ain't done but four thousand miles, not a scratch nor a blemish on her, and runs sweet as a pitcher of new cream. Take it from me, Miss Kenzie, you can't do better. Say the word, and I'll have her up to your house this evening, ready for you to take your first lesson."

The extent of Smiler's sincerity as well as of his regard for the secretary may be judged from the fact that in making this offer he was not only relinguishing his prejudices but also a profitable commission which had been promised him in case he effected a sale. For, at the price that he quoted her, he stood to make not a single cent.

Miss Kenzie probably recognized subconsciously the disinterested quality in his proposal, for although by his own confession she had no reason to put any faith in his statements, she did not even question them, but said the word as suggested, and gave him a check to go and close the deal.

A bargain in the used-car market, however, like time and tide waits for no man and, when Smiler appeared in the rôle of purchaser, he found to his dismay that this one had already been snapped up.

He hated to go back to her after all his boasting, and admit that he had fallen down. No, a Vimplus Eight he had promised her, and a Vimplus Eight she should have.

Playing hookey on the doctor, therefore, he spent the afternoon in scouting about through garages and salesrooms. But second-hand Vimplus Eights seemed for the moment as scarce as huckleberries in December. The only ones he could find were either of such ancient vintage or so debilitated as to be beyond consideration.

Finally, when it was almost six o'clock, and he had practically given up hope, he stumbled on one in a boneyard far over on the East Side, which brought a gleam of puzzled amazement to his eye. Among the shabby wrecks by which it was surrounded, it gleamed like a diamond in a dust heap—new and shining as if it had just been rolled out of the factory.

"How much for that one?" Smiler inquired indifferently, after he had priced several others in which he felt no interest.

The dealer named an apparently reasonable figure, but Smiler was still doubtful. It was too good to be true.

Again he gave the vehicle a searching inspection—body, chassis, wheels, hubs and axles. Not a scar, nor break, nor imperfection anywhere that he could detect. He threw back the hood, and examined the engine. Everything seemed to be all right.

"Turn her over," he directed.

The man complied, and the engine started off as smoothlyy as one could wish. Smiler's acutely trained ear could catch no break or ripple in its even, steady song.

"Satisfied?" the dealer grunted, after it had run uninterruptedly at low speed for about five minutes.

"I guess so." Smiler nodded. Then, before the other could interfere, his hand dived suddenly into the mechanism, and he gave a twist which set the engine to racing.

"Here! What th' hell, you tryin' to do?" the dealer shouted in angry alarm, as he hastily shut off the power. "Want to blow us both up?"

But Smiler was unaffected by his panic.

"I thought so." He smiled triumphantly. "That pretty little trap you've been trying to unload on me has got a cracked cylinder. Anybody else'd

be stuck with it. But I'm just sucker enough to bite. I'll give you three hundred dollars for the bus as she stands. What do you say? Take it, or leave it?"

The dealer almost swooned away. He swore impassionedly that he could make more by dismantling the car and selling the separate parts—which was probably true. But, after protracted haggling, a deal was finally closed at three hundred and seventy-five dollars, and Smiler getting in drove cautiously away.

At seven thirty, he appeared before the door of Miss Kenzie's uptown boarding house, and summoned her out to inspect her new acquisition.

At the sight of it, she broke into gurgles of delight.

"Why, it's the very counterpart of the car the doctor bought for Beatrix!" she exclaimed. "Everything is just the same."

"Well, practically the same," hedged Smiler.

"They're perfect twins, for all I can see." She laughed ecstatically. "And you got this beautiful car for me at less than the price of a Fargo. Oh, Foster, I think that you are simply wonderful!"

"Matter of fact," Smiler avoided her eye, "I was able to shade that figure I named to you by quite considerable. Feller was anxious to sell in a hurry, I seen; so I beat him down to bed rock. This here bus, Miss Kenzie, will stand you just nine hundred and eighty-five dollars."

As will be noted, there was a wide margin between this amount and the price he had actually paid, more by a good deal than Smiler would have netted if he had put through the original deal and taken a commission, which goes to show how generosity is often unexpectedly rewarded—but the deception occasioned Smiler no troublesome qualms.

"If I handed it to her straight," he salved his conscience, "or even told her a cent less'n what I did, she'd have knowed that she's bought a lemon, 'cause she's shopped around enough to find out that Vimplus Eights, secondhand or not, don't go at no flivver prices. But, as it is, she don't see nothing but the nice, shiny enamel and the fresh, new upholstery, and she'll go bragging to all her friends about what a bargain she's got."

And there is something to be said for his viewpoint. Miss Kenzie at any rate was completely satisfied. The boneyard dealer also, in spite of his agonized protests, was well content to have cleared three hundred and seventy-five dollars on an unsalable car. And Smiler had not only the comforting knowledge of Miss Kenzie's approval, but also a clean six hundred and ten dollars to pay him for his trouble. Surely, an act which brings sunshine and happiness into the drab lives of three separate people cannot be wholly reprehensible.

By this time Miss Kenzie had completed her admiring inspection of her new purchase, had climbed inside to try the seats, had brought all her friends out of the boarding house to exclaim and envy, and now she expressed a desire to take a ride.

But to this, Smiler firmly demurred.

"Not to-night, little lady," he said. "Ain't no used car, you see, that's like it had just passed the factory test, and this one needs a little adjusting; carb'reter and a few things like that, y'know, before I take you for a try-out. You wait till to-morrow, and I'll give you a spin that'll make you think you're riding on velvet."

And deaf to the owner's disappointed pleadings and poutings, he cautiously turned the car around, and drove very, very slowly away.

At the same snail's pace, and with an ear constantly cocked to the beat of the engine, he proceeded to the garage and backing gingerly in, stabled Miss Kenzie's car directly beside the one belonging to Beatrix.

"Same as two peas," he muttered, as

dismounting, he stood looking them over; "that is, if you don't care what you say. Well," turning to the locker where he kept his grease-spattered jumper and overalls, "I can't have the little lady thinking that I flimflammed her. Guess I'd better get busy at that there adjustment I was telling her about."

This adjustment, as it proved, was very like that practiced by the wicked nurse in the old fairy tale, who exchanged the two babies in their cradles. For by the time Smiler had finished, the engine with the cracked cylinder was installed in Beatrix's brand-new car, while the bone-yard castaway was equipped with the latest and most perfect product of the Vimplus factory.

To his easy code of morals there was nothing wrong in such a substitution. Doctor Sprague was far better able to afford the cost of replacing the damaged cylinder than Miss Kenzie, and since Beatrix was certain, as soon as she started to operate the car alone, to smash something—it might as well be a cylinder as anything else—he argued that he was merely forestalling the inevitable.

Of course, he could merely have switched the license plates of the two automobiles. But safety first, the doctor or Beatrix might possibly have marked some distinguishing feature which had escaped his own notice. As it was, none but an expert mechanic could detect the fraud, and within a week or two, he felt sure, he could plausibly represent that cracked cylinder as due to the reckless or heedless driving of the doctor's daughter.

It was, however, a long and tedious job that he had set himself. When at last he had completed making all the attachments and connections, and patching up the faulty motor so that it would run at low speed with reasonable security, the gray dawn was filtering in at the garage windows. He gave a final test to the two engines, then straightened up his aching back and wiped his tired, grimy face with a grin of pleased achievement.

He had promised his friend, the secretary, a bargain for her money, and she surely had one—a car as thoroughly capable, efficient and dependable as was she herself. As to the other Vimplus and what would take place when its crippled condition was discovered, why borrow trouble? He would meet that situation when he came to it.

Still there was one fly in the ointment. He could not now abandon the instruction of Beatrix, as he had so vehemently sworn to do, for any other chauffeur would promptly spot the weakness in the altered raceabout and set on foot an investigation that was apt to be attended with unpleasant results.

No, figure as he would, he could see no way to ditch Trixie and her flapper adoration for the present. The thought of her lay heavy on him as he took himself to his room to try and get a few hours of repose, and she pursued him through his troubled dreams with her amorous advances.

Yet he did not regret what he had done. Let the doctor's daughter do her shameless worst, he told himself. He would face even sterner odds than that for the sake of Little Twin-six.

Haggard and heavy-eyed, therefore, but with his face set in lines of unfaltering resolution, Smiler appeared the next morning at the hour appointed for the lesson.

Beatrix greeted him with a look of covert understanding, which told him that his fears were not exaggerated, and as soon as they were at a discreet distance from the house she began to snuggle over toward him.

"When you get to running a car yourself," observed Smiler coldly, "you'll learn, Miss Beatrix, that a driver needs lots of elbow room, 'specially in traffic. You gotta be so that you can grab your

gear shift or your emergency quick, and without no interference."

Beatrix moved back to her own side, but there was a skeptical glint in her eye.

"Apple sauce!" she pouted. "I believe you're just saying that to string me, Foster. I see lots of couples driving with their arms wrapped all around each other."

"Yes," assented Smiler, "and if you follow up the newspapers, you'll read how most of them couples landed in the hospital or else the morgue. I ain't taking no such chances, myself."

"Faint heart never won fair lady," she giggled, and again moved suggestively toward him.

Smiler ground down savagely on the brakes.

"There! Look what you done," he grumbled. "Another second, and you'd 'a' earned me a ticket for runnin' past a traffic signal. You gotta understand, Miss Beatrix, that driving a car don't give no scope for conversation. Your whole attention must be glued to the road."

Still she did not desist.

"Why do you keep saying, 'Miss Beatrix?'" she asked ingratiatingly, when they had started on again. "My friends all call me 'Trix,' or 'Trixie.'"

"Yes?" Smiler stared stolidly ahead. "Well, folks has called me things, too, 't made me mad enough to fight. But I always think of the old saying, 'Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me.' Just remember that, and don't mind 'em, Miss Beatrix.

"And now"—he breathed a sigh of relief as they arrived at the practice street—"take the wheel, please, and let's see how much you've forgot of what I learned you yesterday. You've only got ten days before you come up for your license, you know; and if you expect to pass, you gotta give your full mind to the car and nothin' else. Them examiners'll slough you in a minute, if they get a chance."

So efficacious was this threat that for the lesson period he escaped any further coquetries. Stronger even than her lust for conquest was Beatrix's desire to go shooting around the country with no restraining eye upon her. And she now devoted herself so assiduously to the task of mastering the car that only once did Smiler have occasion to criticize her.

This was toward the end of the session, when with increasing confidence in her own skill she ventured again to push slyly on the accelerator. But Smiler, on the watch this time, abruptly leaned over and shut off the power.

"Now looka here, young lady!" he rebuked her sharply. "The legal speed limits in the City of New York is fifteen mile a hour. What I may do on my own hook, or what anybody else may do ain't got nothing to do with it. But so long as I'm in the car and a-learning you, you ain't going no faster'n fifteen.

"And," he added to himself, "if you're wise, you'll never hit no better'n that—not with that funny cylinder—no matter where you go."

But this censure, instead of abashing Beatrix, only served to turn her flighty thoughts back to her original line.

"Cave man!" she murmured flirtatiously, and Smiler, aghast at what he had drawn upon himself, shrank back into his shell.

Ten days more of this, he reflected gloomily when he was once more rid of her disturbing presence. Ten days more of struggling against her blandishments. Could he stand the strain?

It is doubtful, for Smiler after all was only human and male. But fortunately for him, the hair of the dog is a cure for the bite, and he was strengthened for the combat with Trixie by the feminine sympathy and support he got from Miss Kenzie during her nightly instruction.

Instead of fervid, puppylike rushes at him, he got here a grateful reserve. Instead of infatuation, a maidenly delicacy which lured even while it held him off. The lessons of the one were held in the blazing sunshine of noonday; of the other, in the calm, sentimental twilight. This was in a way symbolical of the differing temperaments of the two.

Trixie, for instance, was forever talking about some guy named Freud, and didn't he think—well, things that it made him red and uncomfortable to hear openly discussed. And when she noted his embarrassment, she laughed at him for being a mid-Victorian—whatever that was.

Miss Kenzie, on the other hand, was always the perfect little lady, content for the most part to sit silent and listen to him descanting on his own merits.

Yet it must be confessed that of his two pupils Trixie made far the better progress. For all her office efficiency, the secretary when it came to driving a car proved what Smiler, if his eyes had not been blinded by partiality, would have termed a total flop. She was timorous, lacking in decision, slow to grasp the principle of the thing. Where Beatrix, if she made a mistake, would retrieve herself by some slap-dash, quick-witted piece of dexterity, Miss Kenzie would boggle and waver and in the end go wrong. On this account, and in order to give better scope to the social amenities, the latter's lessons became more and more mere rides, with Smiler operating the car, and she sitting beside him as passenger and companion.

"And so in sunshine and shadow the days passed." Smiler read the line aloud from a film to which he had escorted Miss Kenzie one evening after their return from driving, and turning to her, murmured:

"Ain't it the truth?"

It was. But it was equally true that with their passing each day brought nearer the one for the license examination, until now it loomed directly ahead. A day that, for Miss Kenzie, Smiler could hardly help forecasting as bleak and gray.

On the morning before, with an aroused sense of duty, he planned that he would devote that entire evening to an intensive, if belated instruction. But late in the afternoon Beatrix slipped a cog in his calculations by insisting that she herself needed a final drill in the niceties of backing and turning.

Sulkily Smiler submitted, because he must, but held out for an hour late enough to allow him a reasonable time with Miss Kenzie.

"There's a full moon to-night," he suggested; "and 'twill be nicer to wait until it comes up, don't you think? Then I'll take you over to Riverside Drive, or to one of the parks, and you can jim around as long as you please."

He was merely floundering around for a plausible excuse, but Trixie got a kick out of his words. A full moon. The bosky shades of the park! They two alone!

"The poor dear!" she thought excitedly. "It's only his shyness that has made him seem so backward and indifferent. With the moonlight and solitude, he feels that he will show more nerve."

And she still held to that theory, even when the evening arrived and Smiler proved himself a lamentable laggard in love. The appointed hour came, and twenty, thirty, forty minutes past it, yet he had not put in an appearance.

"He's over at the garage," she decided, "trying to screw up his courage to come after me."

But, when she went to seek him, she again found herself in error. Her car stood outside at the curb, but Smiler was nowhere in sight. Inquiry among the garage men developed that he had gone out with the other lady. The other lady!

"There he comes now," some one said.

Beatrix looked up the quiet cross street leading to the garage. On it she saw approaching, clearly defined in the moonlight, a Vimplus Eight, the very facsimile of her own, with a woman operating it, and Smiler beside her. Or hardly *beside* her, either, for his arms were about her, his cheek pressed to hers, and his hands over hers on the wheel, helping to guide the car as they raced for the garage.

The moonlight had evidently wrought its spell upon those two, enabling Smiler to overcome Miss Kenzie's coy resistance, and causing him to forget time, space and the doctor's daughter in the ardor of his young romance.

Beatrix's lips set tightly at the spectacle she saw.

"Plenty of elbow room!" she exclaimed indignantly. Then as she noted the speed with which he was scurrying home, she mimicked: "And till they got their license, no pupil of mine ain't going no faster than the legal speed limits!"

"I'll show him!" She turned with mounting anger, and springing into the car waiting at the curb, started it off. By the time it reached Smiler and Miss Kenzie, it was in high and going at thirty miles an hour. He recognized her, as she swept past him.

"Good Lord!" he gasped. "The kid's gone off her nut, and heading straight for suicide. Got to stop her somehow before that bum cylinder goes flooey." And swinging his own car about, he started in pursuit.

There was a delay of several seconds, however, before he could get it through Miss Kenzie's flustered head just what was wrong and induce her to move over and let him have the wheel. So that by the time he could really settle down to the chase, Beatrix now going strong had materially increased her lead.

Up Broadway she flew, indifferent to traffic signals. But luckily it was an hour when travel was light, and the Providence that looks after children, drunken men and imbeciles befriended her. Then, apparently aimless of direction, she twisted and turned through a mesh of West Side streets, keeping him constantly guessing in order to follow her.

But at last, coming out on the brow of the hill at Amsterdam Avenue and One Hundred and Fifty-fifth street, she abandoned her game of hide and seek, and set a straight course for the Bronx. It is a ticklish bit of going here—down a steep, rocky incline to McComb's Dam bridge and its tangle of trolley tracks—but she took it like a swallow. And after her swooped Smiler at a speed that caused Miss Kenzie to clutch at him in terror and inquire hysterically if he had no thought for her.

"Thought of you be damned!" he snapped at her out of the corner of his mouth. "What I'm thinking about is that cracked cylinder I switched out of your car into her'n, and"—a vision of havoc rising before him—"what'll happen if she reaches the Concourse ahead of us, and starts to really let go."

Then, as Miss Kenzie shrank back insulted and rebuffed, he nosed between a couple of trucks, and swinging in and out around half a dozen other cars, shot past the gray-and-green Yankee Stadium like an express train.

Experience and skill were bound to tell. He was gaining fast now by superior chauffeurship. But it proved only a momentary advantage, for just as Smiler came to the Grand Concourse, the traffic cop's hand went up against him, while Beatrix, on the other side, streaked away unhindered up the broad boulevard.

How long would that patched-up motor hold, he wondered as he fretted against the enforced delay? How long before a crash, as he watched her recklessly threading her way through a maze

of speeding cars, and passing them one by one.

Yet, for a novice, he had to admit she was doing wonderfully well. She drove slam-bang, but with sufficient regard for the regulations to escape the attention of the watchful bulls. Apparently she realized by this time that he was in pursuit and, mingling defiance with a measure of discretion, was taking no chances on being intercepted.

To poor Smiler, it seemed as if the very devil himself was with her, as he anxiously followed her trail up the Concourse. Every time the green lights winked on in the traffic towers compelling him to halt, they nipped him squarely on the dead line; while she seemed always able to beat the signal by a block or two, and gain on him just that much.

Nevertheless, she was only three blocks ahead, when the garish lights of Fordham Road loomed in front of them. Would she turn here, he asked himself? If she did, a catastrophe was almost certain on that milling Broadway of the upper Bronx. But no; she kept straight on. And Smiler, breathing freer, went after her to make a grand-stand finish of it. He had the right of way. He would be ahead of her now in two more minutes, and by adroitly blocking the road could force her to come to a stop.

But again the hand of authority went up against him, and he had to waste precious moments explaining to a skeptical cop that he was not really speeding, but merely trying to pass a bonehead who had been persistently blundering across his path.

In the end he got away with nothing worse than a caution and, inured to those, Smiler did not hesitate to cut loose again as soon as the cop had turned back to his post. He was desperate now, for he knew that in the interim Beatrix must have trebled the distance between them.

She had, and with mounting confidence in her skill was now letting out also. There are no traffic towers on the upper end of the Concourse, and less crowding of vehicles. Like twin streaks, the two cars flashed under the overhanging trees that border the broad roadway, and seemed literally to leap from patch to patch of moonlight where the street intersections broke through. Yet, with all his effort, it was not until she had almost reached the northern terminus of the boulevard, where it debouches into Mosholu Parkway, that Smiler was able to draw up on her.

Once more the question arose, which way was she going to turn? To the right, over toward the Botanical Gardens, he decided as she veered in that direction. But abruptly she swerved, and with a derisive honk of her horn, dashed off to the left.

By the time that Smiler was able to straighten out and respond to her saucy challenge, she had gained at least a quarter of a mile by her stratagem.

"Gotta stop her here!" he muttered, crouching to the wheel, and starting to give the car every ounce of power that was in it. "If she ever hits that trick hill at the head of——"

He was interrupted by a sudden, sharp report like a pistol-shot, and a lurch so violent that it almost sent them against the wall of the archway at the Jerome Avenue bridge under which they were passing at the time.

Once more Miss Kenzie clutched at him wildly, then hastily desisted to clap her hands over her ears at the blistering burst of profanity that broke from his lips.

"Lay offa me," he shouted at her, "and set tight. Blow-out or no blow-out, we've got to catch that crazy doll!"

And pitching and tossing as it rocked from side to side, he tried to force the crippled raceabout ahead, mumbling intermingled prayers and curses, as he fought the slewing wheel and stepped harder and harder on the gas.

But battle as he might, the tail-lights of Beatrix's car twinkled mockingly ever farther and farther away. He groaned as he realized the hopelessness of his attempt.

Then across the throbbing hum of her motor as it wafted back to him, cut a discordant, staccatto clatter—a sound which Smiler had never thought he would be glad to hear, but which now seemed to him like sweetest music—and he eased down. The chase was in other hands. The law which Beatrix had so flagrantly flouted was at last upon her trail.

"Ain't no sense in both of us saying good morning to the judge," Smiler philosophized. But he still limped along in the wake of the fugitive so as to be in at the death. "Whyn't the little nut stop?" he grumbled. "There ain't a chance to get away." Then, with a startled gasp: "Surely, she ain't going down there!"

There was reason for his anxiety. Mosholu Parkway, at its western extremity, dips sharply down an almost precipitous slope to Van Cortlandt Park. This was the trick hill of which Smiler had spoken, for it requires careful steering and full control of the car to negotiate in safety. With Trixie, at the pace she was hitting, it was almost unthinkable that disaster could be averted.

Yet, either unconscious of the danger, or indifferent to it, she swept on. Then just on the edge of the incline, like a rabbit doubling on a coursing hound, and without in the slightest checking her speed, she whirled sharply around.

Why her car did not go over, Smiler was never able satisfactorily to explain. For a breath, it balanced perilously on two wheels; then as it righted to an equilibrium, the motor-cycle cop crashed into it.

Smiler was near enough to see the collision. The policeman, unexpectant of such a stunt and almost directly behind her, could not stop or swerve in time to save himself. He and his machine went skittering across the road to land against a tree, a heap of wreckage. And Smiler, even as he jammed down on his own brakes, braced himself for another smash, since he never doubted that Beatrix, unnerved at the accident, would herself come a cropper. Instead, retaining full control, she completed the turn, and skillfully brought her car to a halt.

Seeing that she was all right, if a bit white and shaken, Smiler leaped out and hurried over to the prostrate cop. This end of it did not look so good, for the man was insensible and bleeding from a cut on the side of the head.

"Bill Mackay!" exclaimed Smiler, recognizing one of the stars of the traffic squad as he pulled him from under the twisted motor cycle. "Well, Trixie certainly done herself brown this trip. It's what you might call the end of a perfect day."

He spoke prematurely. It was still far from the end, as was testified by a sudden piercing shriek from Miss Kenzie, and looking up, Smiler saw to his horror the Vimplus he had been driving, with her still aboard, heading full tilt for the hill.

Either he had failed in his excitement to set the brake, or some movement on her part had started it down the grade. Easy enough to stop it of course, if one knew how. But Miss Kenzie in a panic had evidently forgotten all her instruction, and could only wave her arms and scream for help.

Smiler, realizing the hopelessness of reaching her before the car plunged over the bank, stood paralyzed a moment, uncertain what to do.

Then his dilemma was solved for him. With quick presence of mind Beatrix wheeled her car about, and shooting down the slope, ran deftly in front of the runaway. Catching the shock of its impetus while still moving, she slowed

down with nice judgment, and brought both cars to a standstill just at the edge of a cliff.

"Some kid, I'll tell the world!" Smiler shouted aloud in his enthusiasm. "Ain't it a shame that a natural-born driver like that should get the boots, like she's bound to. After ramming this big stiff," scowling at the policeman who, evidently little hurt, was now showing signs of returning consciousness, "they'll never let her get in sight of a license, even if she doesn't have to do time."

At this point, Bill Mackay opened his eyes, and struggling up on one elbow, glared about him.

"What hit me?" he demanded savagely.

A glow of chivalrous self-sacrifice swept over Smiler. "Why, I did, Bill," he answered heroically.

"Was that you chasing hell-bent all over the country, and doing that circus stunt on a turn, with never so much as a finger out?" The officer stared incredulously. "You must be full of hop."

He reached painfully for his book and pencil, meanwhile expressing his opinion of chauffeurs as a class and Smiler in particular with vehement intensity.

Beatrix, supporting the collapsed and weeping figure of Miss Kenzie, came up in time to hear the end of his withering exordium, and would have interrupted, but Smiler, getting behind the angry cop, enjoined her with frantic gestures to keep silence.

But, drinking in the policeman's blasting invective like a drunkard sampling some exquisite tipple, she was not to be denied.

"Don't you believe him, officer," she cried impatiently "He's just trying to play movie hero, and shield me. And what was that last you called him, please?"—admiringly. "A peanut-headed cockroach? Oh, I just love that!"

Mackay stared at her dazedly. "You say you hit me?" he gasped. Then, habit asserting itself: "Let me see your license."

"I haven't any license."

She waited. But as Mackay turned his head toward her, she saw the cut above his temple.

"Oh, you are hurt!" she exclaimed. "Come," impulsively catching him by the arm. "My car is right over here. I'll take you to my father. He's Doctor Sprague."

To Smiler's surprise, Mackay yielded meek as a lamb and, rising, started to follow her. He did not understand that the officer saw in Trixie not the pest that he himself regarded her, but a ministering and sympathetic angel, who might have done something a little rash, but ought not to be called too severely to account.

Still his amazement was not so strong as to cloud his wits.

"Er," he broke in. "If I was you, Miss Beatrix, I wouldn't use that bus of your'n. Can't run no new car at the rate you was hitting, and not put something on the blink. Shouldn't wonder a bit if you'd cracked a cylinder."

"Oh, let her have my car," burst out Miss Kenzie hysterically. "Let her keep it. I never want to drive one of the things again as long as I live."

"Well, now, that might be a s'lution." Smiler wrinkled up his nose. "No one can't tell the difference 'twixt the two and, with all due respect, Miss Kenzie, you won't never make a driver. Tell you what I'll do," generously. "I'll take the damaged car off the two of you, and pay Miss Kenzie just exactly what she put into it. Wait now, Miss Beatrix, and I'll put on the spare tire and have her car ready for you in a jiffy."

As he worked over it, Beatrix came over to him.

"This is certainly very decent of you, Foster," she spoke coldly. "Still I must admit that you have disappointed me. I thought that you were strong and virile, but you cringed before that policeman

like a whipped dog. He is my idea of what a real man should be. And, oh, how beautifully he bawled you out."

Then she got into the car with her "real man," and drove away.

"And that," growled Smiler, "is what you get for trying to school a skirt. Money out, time out, labor out; and in the end not even a thank you.

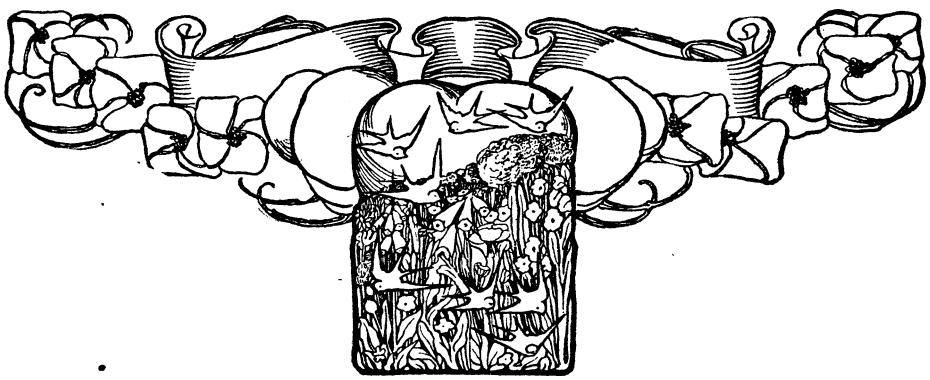
"Still," he turned to Miss Kenzie, who by this time had regained something of her composure, "we've got the little bus here, and if it's cost me something, it's all in the family, as you might say."

"I don't know about that." The secretary's lips turned down primly. "After the way you have treated me tonight, Smiler, and the brutal manner in which you spoke to me, I am afraid I shall have to reconsider. Stop a taxicab, please," pointing to one that was passing, "and I'll——"

"Here!" interrupted Smiler. "I've had all the femin-ine foolishness that I can stand for one night. You shut your trap, and get into that bus, and behave yourself." He grabbed her by the arms and lifted her into the car.

"Cave man!" murmured Miss Kenzie softly as he took his seat beside her.

And this time, Smiler, as he drove away into the moonlit beauty of the park, did not wince at the epithet.



The Get-Together Club

BY the time you get this number of COMPLETE STORY MAGAZINE into your hands you will have had two issues of PEOPLE'S under its new name. We speak of it as PEOPLE'S because it really is the same magazine, without serials and with a new name and—we hope—better stories.

We are waiting, with boundless interest and with more or less anxious expectancy, to see what your reaction is going to be to this new departure. Of course we ought to know exactly what that reaction will be, for haven't we given you what you've all been asking for—a magazine that has cast out forever the phrase "To be continued?"

We suppose that we have the right to take it for granted that the demand so nearly unanimous as yours has been to discontinue serials represents a feeling that exists in the same proportion among those who have not been readers of PEOPLE'S in the past. Consequently it is fairly possible that this feeling about serials may attract a good many such nonreaders. For the benefit of such new recruits to our ranks we wish to say a few things that are already familiar to you.

First of all, about this department, we want to tell them that it belongs to all our readers, new and old, who want to make use of it. This is an open forum where everybody is not only allowed, but expected, to say whatever he wants to, the only restriction being that it should be a fair give-and-take matter. We only ask our readers to do as they would be done by in their debates of matters that interest them. Within these limitations they are invited to express what opinions they please. We are printing a letter below, by the way, which marks another stage in one of these debates by two of our enterprising readers.

The second matter we have to present has to do with the character and quality of the fiction we have tried, and shall continue to try, to give you. Our purpose has been to construct each number of the magazine around the ideas of adventure and romance. These two, perhaps, are elements which make life most colorful. There are very few human beings who have not dreamed of themselves as the central figures in some imaginative episode of adventure or romance—romance, that is, in its broad sense, not merely the sentimental kind. And the idea that we have of stories of this type embraces a wide range of plot, characters, and setting. We have published a good many so-called Western stories, for the West has been, and still is for that matter, a rich field for free living human beings. But we have realized that there is no part of the globe inhabited by men and women that is entirely destitute of absorbingly interesting happenings, and a really dramatic human story is welcome whatever its setting may be—provided, however, that

it is clean and sincere and realistic, for we do not care for burlesque or farce or sex complications.

So that is the kind of fiction you may expect to find in COMPLETE STORY MAGAZINE. We confess that we have implicit faith in the *human* element in stories. All of us being human ourselves it is, in our opinion, natural and inevitable, that the things which interest us most are the emotions, the qualities—such as courage, generosity, enterprise, persistence, et cetera, in *action*—the difficulties and perplexities, the dangers and achievements of real, live, *human beings*. It is the genuineness of characters which make the *realism*—a word much discussed and much abused—in fiction. If we can succeed in giving you this sort of thing consistently we think you will be pleased. Anyway, you ought to be.

Here is another letter from our old friend Mr. Barnett. He has addressed it to us but there is no doubt that it is aimed at another old friend, Mr. Boyd. We are glad that some one recognizes the fact that magazine editors and manuscript readers are not supermen and women. If everybody realized that fact we might not have to remember so acutely that the editor's life is not a happy one—to paraphrase Gilbert and Sullivan.

POST OFFICE BOX 251.
August 15, 1924.

The Editor, PEOPLE'S MAGAZINE,
79-89 Seventh Avenue,
New York City, N. Y.

MY DEAR MR. SESSIONS: The current issue of PEOPLE'S is a James D. Dandy, and all that sort of thing. No finer grade of quality fiction can be found anywhere on the American market. It represents all that excellence in editorial selection and writing creation can make it. Twenty cents' worth of extra-good interesting reading, thanks to your editorial self.

I notice, by way of mention, on page 190, August 1st issue, a lengthy letter from our long-winded friend, "The Native Son," Mr. George C. Boyd, Watts, California. Mr. Boyd sure does love to spread his special brand of editorial joy, and don't for one second deny himself the privilege of kicking in his er—er—alleged expert opinion on how a magazine should and should not be published.

Frankly, Mr. Sessions, I really believe the only way you will ever get away from Mr. Boyd's outbursts is to give him a job as managing editor, or some position wherein he can bring into operation his vast-seeing, unlimited knowledge of the writing game. He seems to know all, and since that is an apparent fact, why in the name of Heaven do you insist on holding down the managing editor's chair, when such a wonderful self-possessed-of publication knowledge is running loose?

Mr. Boyd presumes to criticize my letters, while other people far more efficient remain silent. Of course the reason for his taking exception to my remarks is obvious enough; however, he comes back at me very mildly, due no doubt to the fact that he is afraid to commit himself further for the reason he may hit a weak place in the ice he persists in skating over—in print. Thin ice, as it were.

No publication is perfect, nor is their staff of readers and editors gifted with the supernatural ability. Perfection exists in California only—particularly in the city of Watts.

Why the first work of most writers is rejected can be explained by saying, "The first product from the pen of the future mighty is not the first but the altered first—the work that has gone the rounds, and constant rejection has led the writer to believe that certain changes are necessary. After the changes are made the work is accepted. Fame may result. Yet were the same editors given the altered work to read the chances are that they, too, would have purchased it." Few writers arrive or hit the bull's-eye the first shot. I've been writing for many years, and I have not arrived yet, while some other chap with the same product of pen as mine would have sold it long ago. Some are born famous, others have fame thrust upon them, others acquire fame, and still others numbered among the life rabble go stone blind seeking it. I seem to be in the latter class, Mr. Boyd.

Winning recognition via the printed-word route is a matter of touching the secret mainspring at the right time—hitting some idea or tapping some unseen spring of inspiration for a theme to enlarge upon. Jack London, whom I knew personally, could have been still writing and not have acquired fame if he failed to hit the right line of literary product. He hit his highest point of

excellence and produced his best by painting pictures of the sea and odd sides of existence. "Smoke Bellow" and "Valley of the Moon" are samples of his best; however, there are others among his works just as good, but not so characteristically word pictured. Jack lived his stories first—and that is why most writers fail: They only see and do not feel what they are writing about. Seeing alone does not make reality—the feel is damnably essential, if you pardon my Spanish.

Editors, as a rule, use all due care in selecting fiction for publication. Their jobs depend on it, Mr. Boyd. Why pan the editors? Why try and teach a man a trade that you are unfamiliar with?

Padding stories, as well as letters, is not skill, but a means whereby a short story can be enlarged or drawn out. Any one can pad a letter or story, if they know anything about the English language at all.

You use the word "find" in connection with writers. Mr. Boyd, you are not fair. That is a theatrical expression—one that many theater managers have lost sleep over—and is not applicable to the craft of writing. Why? Writers have to have the goods to deliver before they are greeted by a check—and an actor can photograph well or have a "charming" personality and still be a box-office find—yet not be an artist or deserve classification among artists, as writers can. When an editor discovers—finds—an outstanding writer rest assured he is *good,* otherwise he would remain among the jitney-bus writers like myself, for instance.

Write us a story, Mr. Boyd; as they say in Texas, put up or shut up. That would be more creditable and more impressive than letters, just letters.

I thank you. Sincerely yours,

JOHN E. BARNETT.

Cumberland, Md.

We think that the point made by Mr. Fernandez in the following letter is well taken.

Let us say, however, in extenuation, at least so far as we, editorially, are concerned, that Mr. Freeman, the author of the story in question, lives, and has lived for many years in New Mexico not far from the border and, as we have presumed, is familiar with Spanish.

TAMPA, FLORIDA,
August 15, 1924.

To the Editor of PEOPLE'S.

DEAR SIR: I have been an ardent magazine reader for a number of years, and think yours is among the best. But I have a complaint to make against all magazines which publish stories of Mexico or the Mexican border, and that is: That most of the writers find that putting in a word or two of Spanish in a story of that sort gives it a little foreign romance, which is quite right if those are put in there correctly, for Mexicans use very good Spanish.

For example, in your issue of June 15th there appeared a novel, by Carl Elmo Freeman, under the name of "Black Jack's Range," in which a sheepman tells a Mexican, *"su quere."* This should have been *"Si tu la queres."* In the same story there appeared numerous other mistakes.

It seems to me that writers should learn Spanish before trying to write it, for, as it is being taught in a great many schools in this country, the errors are noticed by a large number of readers.

Hoping your magazine will continue as good as it now is, I remain, yours very truly,

N. B. FERNANDEZ.

Let's Talk It Over

NEW BUTTONS

A NEW uniform often transforms a man inwardly as well as outwardly. He feels that whatever his past might have been, the uniform requires of him a new man—a man who measures up not only to the dimensions of the uniform, but to the duties which that uniform demands of him. The uniform *means* something to the public; the man who wears it usually does his best to conform exactly to the standard which the public has set for him.

This applies not only to policemen, soldiers, and others who wear the brass buttons emblematic of the protectors of civilization. In a way, every man, woman, and child wears brass buttons—emblems of the responsibility vested in them to do their full share toward furthering the best interests of the human race. A good citizen is one who feels this responsibility and lives up to it; a bad citizen is one who ignores that responsibility—one who, instead of living up to the standard which the public demands of him, regards those who have been appointed the protectors of civilization as his enemies, and defies the uniform of the law, either openly or covertly.

It is easy enough to say, "Oh, I'm a good citizen. I've never violated the laws. I've never been arrested. Why persist in flaunting that overworked word 'responsibility?'"

Yes, perhaps this man has kept the written laws. But how about the unwritten laws? How about loyalty to his employer? Unwritten? Yes, but one of the basic laws of civilization, scarcely second to the unwritten law of loyalty to family. Can that man think of any of his employer's secrets which he has exposed? Any confidence, however trifling, violated? If so, that employee has defiled his uniform—the uniform that stands for business morale.

Or how about his loyalty to his family, that even greater bond of responsibility? Has he deprived his children of education for the sake of gratifying some selfish desire? Does he do his full share toward making his home pleasant? He has never been arrested for nonsupport. But has he practiced self-sacrifice in giving his family the best that his purse, no matter how meager, can afford? And how about his parents? Has he honored them by making their declining years as carefree as his income allows?

The moral standard of every man, woman, and child set by the uniform of responsibility is often a difficult one to live up to. For whereas the uniform of the policeman demands enforcement of written laws, our uniforms of moral responsibility often demand the even more exacting enforcement of unwritten laws—laws which must be weighed and enforced within the secret confines of our own minds.

COM 9A

Each Grain an Adventure

Luscious and Enticing

To bring enchantment to the breakfast table

CRISP and flaky grains of selected wheat, puffed to 8 times their normal size, light as the air, and with the rich flavor of nut meats.

You serve with sugar and cream. Or in bowls of milk. And as a special allurement, with fresh or cooked fruit. No breakfast before has ever compared.

To children Quaker Puffed Wheat brings the nourishment of whole grains with the richness of a rare confection; to adults an almost perfect food. Quickly digested and assimilated; kernels steam exploded, with every food cell broken.

An energy food of fairy delight —yet with vitamines, bran and minerals in balanced combination.

Quaker Puffed Rice, Also

Whole rice kernels, steam exploded to 8 times normal size, like the Puffed Rice. Dainty morsels so light and inviting you would never dream they could be so nutritious.

Quaker Puffed Wheat

Quaker Puffed Rice

Perfect Health — why not?

This simple food has given it to thousands

THESE remarkable reports are typical of thousands of similar tributes to Fleischmann's Yeast. There is nothing mysterious about its action. It is not a "cure-all," not a medicine in any sense. But when the body is choked with the poisons of constipation—or when its vitality is low so that skin, stomach and general health are affected—this simple, natural food achieves literally amazing results.

Concentrated in every cake of Fleischmann's Yeast are millions of tiny yeast-plants, alive and active. At once they go to work—invigorating the whole system, clearing the skin, aiding digestion, strengthening the intestinal muscles and making them healthy and active.

"I believe that I am a pioneer in the Yeast-for-Health habit. I was one of those unfortunate youngsters who are neither sick nor well. I had a very poor appetite, and my mother humored me when she discovered that I liked yeast. (This was years ago.) It was not very long before the yeast started to take effect. . . . I had a desire to play. My body seemed to grow stronger, and my mother said that I was like a new child. I have been using Fleischmann's Yeast ever since, whenever I felt the need of a regulator—a matter of thirteen years."

(Miss Laura Banker, Albany, N. Y.)

"After several years' strenuous work of studying I faced a new position with lowered resistance and depleted nerve force, and a splotchy, yellow complexion. Frankly, I scoffed at the idea of yeast helping, but the first benefit I noticed was—a long-standing chronic constipation relieved. Next, a clear complexion that was a surprise to my friends. In two months I faced life cheerfully, buoyantly and confidently."

(Miss Alice D. Nelson, Wilmington, Del.)

"For two years I was never free from boils. While touring with the *Irene* Company one broke out on my chin which caused my whole neck to swell and turn purple. The hotel doctor said that if I would take fresh yeast and would keep taking it he would guarantee I would never have another boil. I started right in taking Fleischmann's Yeast and in two days the boil was drying up. That doctor told the truth: I have never had a boil since."

(Mr. M. W. Robertshaw, New York City)

Dissolve one cake in a glass of water (just hot enough to drink)

—before breakfast and at bedtime. Fleischmann's Yeast, when taken this way, is especially effective in overcoming or preventing constipation.

Or eat 2 or 3 cakes a day—spread on bread or crackers—dissolved in fruit juices or milk—or eat it plain.

Fleischmann's Yeast comes only in the tinfoil package—it cannot be purchased in tablet form.

All grocers have it. Start eating it today! You can order several cakes at a time, for yeast will keep fresh in a cool, dry place for two or three days.

Write us for further information or let us send you a free copy of our latest booklet on Yeast for Health. Address: Health Research Dept. Z-9, The Fleischmann Company, 701 Washington Street, New York City.

"If you don't believe it, I'll show you!"

—*what Listerine does to onion odor*

THEY had been reading a magazine advertisement about Listerine, the well-known antiseptic, and about its wonderful deodorizing power. It spoke of how Listerine removes onion odor and it challenged the reader to make this test:

"Rub a bit of fresh onion on your hand. Douse on a little Listerine. The onion odor immediately disappears."

She was skeptical and bet that it couldn't be done. He had seen it demonstrated before and set out to prove it to her. The girl lost her bet. But she gained a valuable bit of information.

Listerine *is* a really remarkable deodorant. And Listerine advertising does not overstate the case.

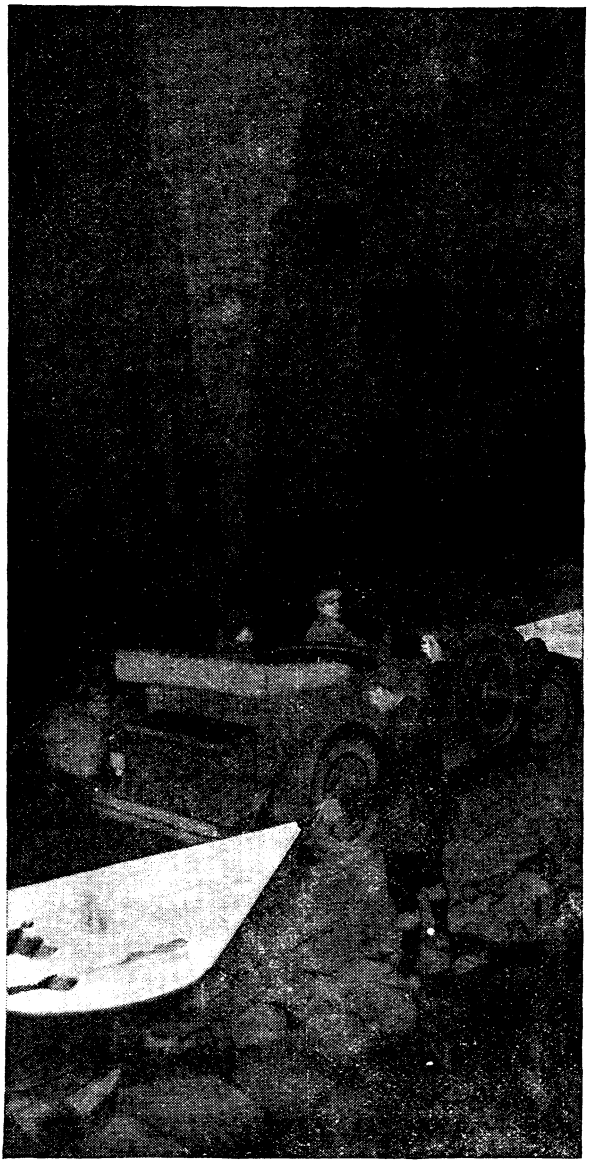
That is why so many thousands use it daily to combat halitosis (the medical term for unpleasant breath). And that is why so many thousands of women are coming to use it as a perspiration deodorant. They just apply it clear. It is non-irritating, refreshing, does not stain garments and *it does the work.*

Try it this way some day when you don't have time for a tub or shower. It requires only a moment. You'll be delighted—*Lambert Pharmacal Company, Saint Louis, U. S. A.*

LISTERINE —*The safe antiseptic*

EVEREADY
FLASHLIGHTS
& BATTERIES
–they last longer

Backing around at night—*use your flashlight!*



No. 2671—*Eveready 2-cell Focusing Spotlight with 200-foot range.*

* *

Eveready Unit Cells fit and improve all makes of flashlights. They insure brighter light and longer battery life.

PITCH-BLACK night . . . narrow, high-crowned road. To back around, use your flashlight! Avoid ditches and dark embankments.

Use your Eveready to examine the carburetor. Play safe. Use it to see how much gas is in the tank. (You could safely poke a lighted Eveready into a barrel of gasoline!) Use it to change a tire, to find the jack or pliers, to put the curtains on.

The long-range Evereadys are great for motoring. Shoot a beam 200, 300 or 500 feet, depending on which focusing type you select. Read road-signs with them without leaving the car.

The aluminum Evereadys at 65c and 75c, complete with battery, are small and practical. Handy to have in the car or carry in your coat-pocket. A good type to use around the house too.

Reload your flashlights and keep them on the job with fresh, strong Eveready Unit Cells. And if you haven't a flashlight, see the nearest Eveready dealer at once.

The improved Eveready line has many new features, new designs. Standard Eveready features are retained. 65c to $4.50, complete with battery—anywhere in the U. S. A.

Buy from electrical, hardware and marine supply dealers, drug, sporting goods and general stores, garages and auto accessory shops.

Manufactured and guaranteed by

NATIONAL CARBON COMPANY, INC.
New York San Francisco
Canadian National Carbon Co., Limited, Toronto, Ont.

Boyce-ite

Every time you buy gasoline

Look for the Boyce-ite advertising in

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and leading newspapers here and abroad

Experienced motorists of America have formed a new habit—the habit of using Boyce-ite every time they buy gasoline.

The Boyce-ite habit is a good habit—an economical habit.

—Boyce-ite makes your motor start easier.

—gives it more power—smoother operation.

—adds from 1 to 6 miles to every gallon of gasoline you buy.

—and does away forever with the expense and annoyance of grinding valves, cleaning spark plugs and removing carbon.

Boyce-ite makes old cars run better and new cars last longer. No one knows how far a carbonless motor will run.

Now the proper and economical way to use Boyce-ite is not occasionally—not now and then—but every time you buy gasoline.

Occasional use of course affords temporary relief—but it seems foolish to remove carbon today and allow it to form again tomorrow.

Even a speck of carbon causes premature wear, perhaps at some vital part—and all gasoline forms carbon until it has been treated with Boyce-ite.

The moment carbon begins to accumulate, your car is headed for the repair shop.

Remember, Boyce-ite has passed the "wonder if" stage—every motorist who has used it continuously knows that it is the best fuel for his motor, and whether you drive a Ford or a Rolls-Royce you will find it true.

You are not pioneering when you join the army of those who use Boyce-ite every time they buy gasoline but are lagging behind the times until you do.

To date over 11,000,000 cans of Boyce-ite have been sold—Boyce-ite is now carried by dealers in every city, town and hamlet in the United States.

Convenient touring package fits the pocket of your car—contains 3 cans of Boyce-ite—$1.00.

Boyce-ite can also be obtained in ½ gallon, 1 gallon and 5 gallon containers.

Harrison Boyce

BOYCE & VEEDER CO., Inc., *Manufacturers of Boyce-ite exclusively*, L. I. C., N. Y.

MAKES AUTOS GO 40 MILES ON A GALLON OF GASOLINE

SIOUX FALLS, S. Dak.—The Western Specialty Company of this city announces the perfection of an amazing device which is enabling car owners all over the country to more than double their mileage from each gallon of gasoline used, and at the same time remove every particle of carbon from their motors. When the device is attached, automobiles have made over 40 miles on a gallon of gasoline—increased their power and pep tremendously and eliminated all spark plug difficulties.

This inexpensive little device is entirely automatic and self-regulating and can be easily attached by anyone in a few minutes without tapping or drilling.

The management of the company states that in order to introduce this startling new invention they are willing to send a sample at their own risk to one car owner in each town who can show it to neighbors and handle the big volume of business which will be built up wherever it is shown.

Just send your name and address to the Western Specialty Co., 902 Lacotah Bldg., Sioux Falls, S. Dak., and get their free sample offer.

~~$45.00~~ Bed Room Outfit

Sale Price Complete $34.85

Outfit Includes:

2-inch post Steel Bed; 45 lb. Mattress; Link Fabric Spring; 2 Fine Pillows; 1 Bed Sheet; 2 Splendid Pillow Cases; 1 pr. Voile Curtains; 1 Oval Woven Rag Rug

Regular Price $45.00
Sale Price Complete— $34.85

Sent for Only $1.00 Down

30 Days' Free Trial—Send Coupon Today

Once you see this quality outfit installed in your home you will realize that here is the most astounding value ever offered in attractive bedroom furnishings.

THE BED—a genuine Simmons product, continuous post, all steel construction. The head 50 in. high; the foot 34 in. high; posts 2 in. in diameter; fillers oval in shape; finish, the Vernis Martin gold bronze, comes only in full size 4 ft. 6 in. wide.

THE MATTRESS—full 45 pound weight and reversible. Heavy layers of soft cotton felt on both top and bottom, sanitary excelsior between. The beautiful floral art ticking is deeply tufted, with double stitched roll edges and round corners.

THE SPRING—a fully guaranteed link fabric construction, built to last a lifetime. Kept perfectly stretched so it cannot sag by helical steel springs securely anchored in the angle iron frame. Finished in black Japan.

PILLOWS—Stuffed with double dusted, steam dressed and cured feathers, sanitary, odorless. Floral art ticking to match mattress.

RUG—An oval, Colonial Style Woven Rag Rug, strongly sewed and sized to lay flat. Assorted colors.

CURTAINS—of very fine quality ruffled voile, hemstitched, with tie backs. Each curtain 27 in. wide; full 2¼ yd. length.

BED SHEET and 2 Pillow Cases—splendid quality, bleached, 3 in. hem.

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Send at once for a free copy of our latest catalog Everything to make your home complete; everything at bargain prices and a wonderful variety to choose from. But just see for yourself. Send for the catalog now.

Simply mail the coupon with $1 and the complete outfit as illustrated and described above will be shipped to your home on 30 days Free Trial. If it fails to come up to your expectations, you are free to return it to us, and we will return your $1 deposit, with freight charges both ways. Can you imagine a safer way to buy? We can make this exceptional offer only because we know you will be delighted with your purchase and will gladly pay the balance in our easy monthly installments of only $3. Take advantage of this offer now, while you can. Remember, a regular $45 value for only $34.85, if you order at once. Mail the coupon, with only $1.

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L. FISH FURNITURE CO., Dept. 10-87
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Enclosed is $1.00. Ship advertised Complete Steel Bedroom Outfit No. A500 I am to have 30 days FREE Trial. If I keep the outfit, I will pay you $3 a month. If not satisfied, I will return the outfit within 30 days, and you are to return my $1 deposit and any freight charges I have paid.

No. A500—$1 Down; $3.00 a month; Total $34.85

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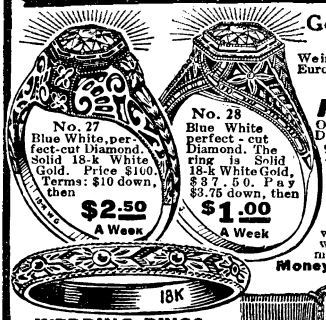

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Hose Supporters for All the Family

Are preferred, principally because the quality of webbing and workmanship never varies and is always of the best. The Oblong Rubber Button keeps stockings taut without twisting, eliminates runs and tears.

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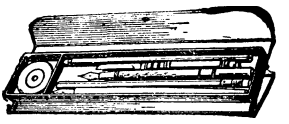

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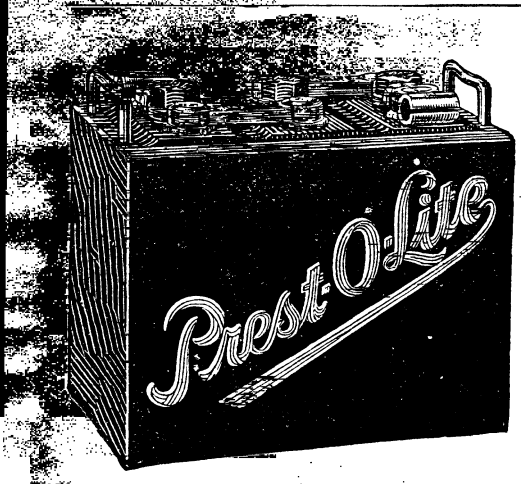

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$14.65

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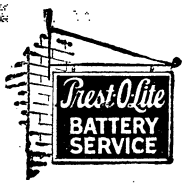

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Service Stations Everywhere

An Achievement in Values

For Radio "A" Batteries

Radio users without exception have found Prest-O-Lite "A" Batteries highly dependable and steady in their current out-put.

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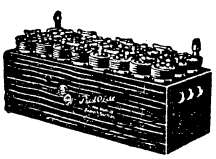

Prest-O-Lite wet "B" Batteries give years of constant, dependable service. An occasional recharge and they're as good as new. Their initial cost is surprisingly low.

Here is the most extraordinary battery value ever offered the motorist—the high quality improved Prest-O-Lite battery at $14.65, a reduction from $20.50. This achievement could be accomplished only by an organization such as Prest-O-Lite with its enormous resources, up-to-date methods of manufacture and perfected system of distribution.

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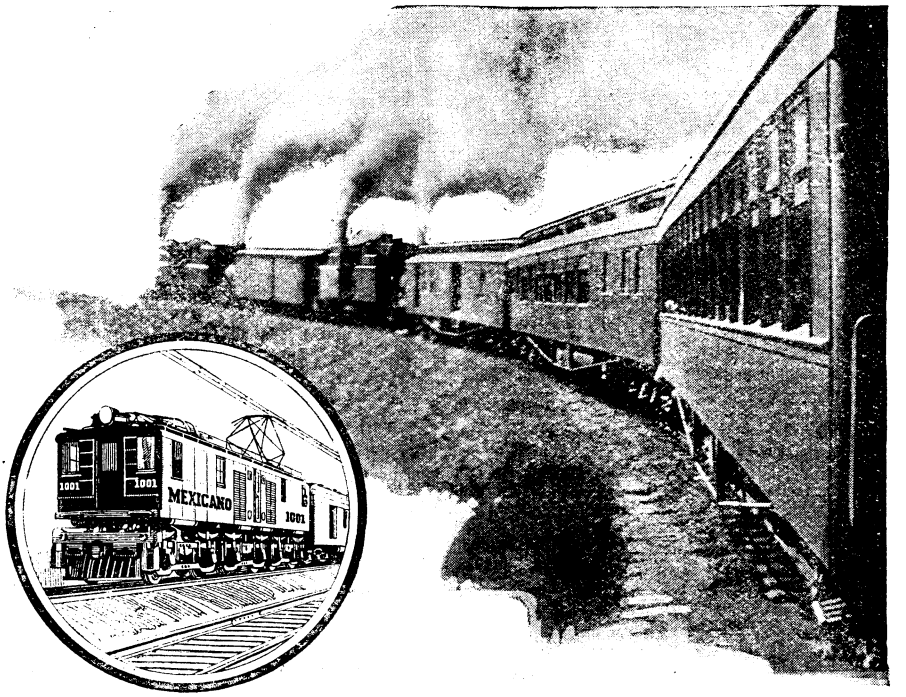
THE OLDEST SERVICE TO MOTORISTS



In the circle at the left is one of the electric locomotives that will replace the steam engines.

10 locomotives will take the place of 25

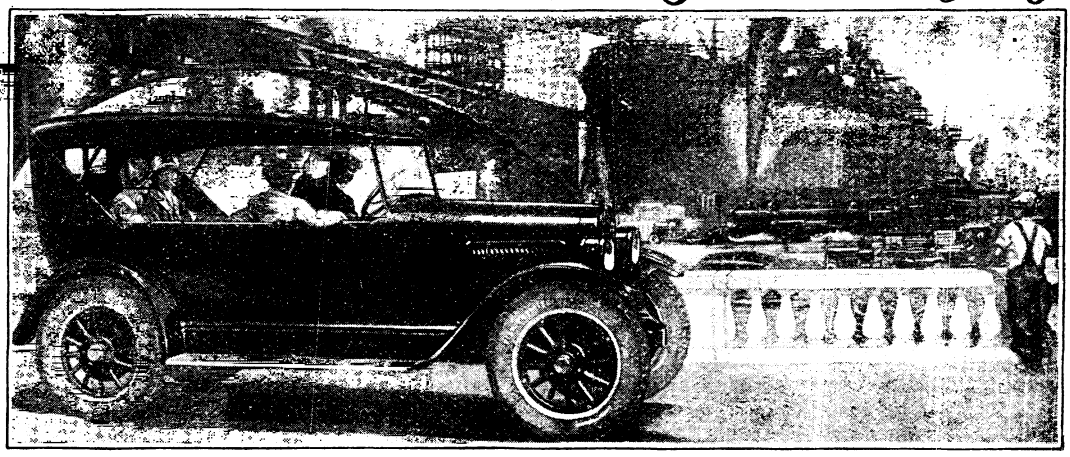
Electric locomotives draw long trains 650 miles over the Rocky Mountains on the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul. Eventually most of the railroads in America will be electrified—engineers estimate that this will save more than a hundred million tons of coal a year.

The General Electric Company is electrifying the Mexican Railway between Orizaba and Esperanza. On the first section—with many curves and heavy grades—10 *electric* locomotives will take the place of 25 *steam* locomotives.

Economies resulting from electrification will repay the cost of the improvement within five or six years.

GENERAL ELECTRIC

All Steel Adopted for Greater Safety



With Everlasting Baked Enamel Finish

Most motor car bodies are skeletons of wood, with thin sheets of steel nailed outside—whereas the Overland body is *all* steel, a frame of steel covered with steel—all steel, welded into one-piece solidity.

Wood collapses at a bending stress of 5,000 lbs. to the square inch—whereas steel will stand a stress of 35,000 lbs. to the square inch. That's the kind of strength and safety and durability Overland gives you!

—the *only* touring car under $800 with coachwork entirely of steel! Body by Budd, pioneer in steel bodies.

—the *only* touring car under $800 with a genuine finish of hard-baked enamel!

You can pour scalding water on this finish or scrub it with strong chemicals used to remove road tar—and even turn the scorching flame of a blow-torch on it without marring its gleaming beauty. A finish that keeps its good looks in spite of time, dirt and weather . . . In an age of steel, drive an all-steel reliable Overland!

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